PALESTINE

A SOCIALIST INTRODUCTION



Edited by Sumaya Awad & brian bean

Praise for *Palestine: A Socialist Introduction*

"In *Palestine: A Socialist Introduction*, editors Sumaya Awad and brian bean introduce both the question of Palestine as well as socialist principles—topics that have each produced volumes of scholarly literature—to new audiences. They accomplish this tremendous feat with moral clarity and analytical rigor. The volume provides the reader with an internationalist framework, defined as a commitment to anti-imperialism, and uses it to place Palestine into local, regional, and global historical context. The book connects the past to our present and, despite the daunting odds before us, sustains a commitment to a socialist future where all of us are free because all of us are free." —**Noura Erakat**, author of *Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine*

"A crucial reminder that Israel's settler-colonial project is not merely a historical event that we can move past, but an ongoing reality backed by successive Western administrations. In moments where those who fight for freedom and equality triumph in their local battles around the world, we (Palestinians) see this as part of the victory in our battle for freedom in Palestine. Only through the strengthening of our civil society, of trade unions and workers, can we build our struggle against occupation and pressure Israel until it ends its project of colonialism and racial segregation. This volume lays bare just that." **—Ahmed Abu Artema**, Palestinian journalist and peace activist

"The Vietnam War was once a line in the sand. Protests against the war radicalized a generation, built a new left, and taught it why imperialism was indispensable for capitalism. Palestine is the Vietnam of our times. This urgent book will offer a new generation of activists lessons on why, to fight capitalism and apartheid today, we need to fight like Palestinians." **—Tithi Bhattacharya**, coauthor of *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*

"This collection is a poignant and incisive engagement with the past, and possible future, role of the left in the struggle for justice in Palestine. From critical analysis of organizational matters to the very complex issues of gender and secularism, this book is a must-read for anyone whose socialism has brought them to care and act on behalf of Palestine and the Palestinians. As a left, we are at a crucial juncture of strategic contemplation in general and on Palestine in particular. This book offers ways forward that can reenergize the left as a robust alliance of identification and solidarity for the sake of the liberation of Palestine as well as that of all the oppressed workers and peoples around the globe." **—Ilan Pappé**, author of *Ten Myths About Israel*

"Nine powerful essays, meticulously woven together by Sumaya Awad and brian bean, combine rich political history with incisive analysis of the current conjuncture and struggle. The book provides an entry point for new activists to understand a conflict whose history has been so deliberately obfuscated, alongside a rich well of analysis on complex political questions. Awad and bean's book should be widely read, and its socialist, bottom-up vision of transformation acted upon." **—Hadas Thier**, author of *A People's Guide to Capitalism: An Introduction to Marxist Economics*

"The contributions within this book not only offer an understanding of Palestinian realities, they also provide insight into themes such as diaspora and the search for belonging, and reflect the voices of all those who wish to return home in dignity, justice, and freedom. In essence it is a book which outlines a roadmap for return, with nuance and an offer to go beyond acknowledging the injustice in order to do something about it." **—Mariam Barghouti**, Palestinian American writer

“This collection of essays is an essential contribution to the socialist perspective on the issue of Palestinian liberation. Its authors share a valuable overarching insight: that for socialists the fight for Palestinian individual and national rights is not a mere object of abstract solidarity, but must be approached within the context of the international struggle against imperialism and for socialism.” —**Moshé Machover**, author of *Israelis and Palestinians: Conflict and Resolution*

“A Palestine primer for the growing socialist movement, and an argument for socialism for the growing Palestine solidarity movement, this book is a valuable resource for building the type of US left that the world desperately needs.” —**Danny Katch**, author of *Socialism ... Seriously: A Brief Guide to Human Liberation*

“The truth is simple: the Palestinian people deserve the right to self-determination. But to get to that truth, you need to understand the history and politics of their struggle. This book is a tremendous roadmap to get to that truth.” —**Dave Zirin**, author of *A People’s History of Sports in the United States*

“Essential reading for anybody interested in understanding the past, present, and future of the Palestinian liberation struggle.” —**Eric Blanc**, author of *Red State Revolt: The Teachers’ Strike Wave and Working-Class Politics*

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إلى الشهداء

For the martyrs

Contents



INTRODUCTION

About This Book

Sumaya Awad & brian bean

> The Palestinian cause is not a cause for Palestinians only,
> but a cause for every revolutionary, wherever he is, as a cause
> of the exploited and oppressed masses in our era.
>
> —*Ghassan Kanafani*

This book is born in the midst of a highly polarized political moment in the long historical struggle for the liberation of Palestine. The winds of sympathy for the Palestinian people blow among the peoples of the world, and a solidarity movement, with boycott, divestment, and sanctions as the key components, blossoms. At the same time, repression carried out by states and governments against Palestine activism has been fierce. In Palestine, the situation is dire, with the expansion of settlements, possible annexation in the West Bank, and the unlivable conditions of the open-air prison of Gaza. The political movement is trapped at an impasse of never-ending "peace talks" over the terms of oppression and occupation that has

been the status quo since the 1993 Oslo Accords. Donald Trump's so-called Deal of the Century, which amounts to official adoption of apartheid, is the grim culmination of this process.[1] At the same time there is new hope in the waves of mobilizations like the Great March of Return in Gaza, but also beyond Palestine, across the Arab world, from Iraq to Lebanon to Iran. All of this is situated in a Middle East and North Africa region that continues to erupt in revolts and uprisings against unjust economic conditions and undemocratic governments. These are local and regional expressions of a global economic and climate crisis that has produced a worldwide refugee crisis of staggering proportions, a rise internationally of far-right forces and governments, and looming military tension between the major world powers. The future of Palestine is woven into this fabric of despair and resistance. The liberation of Palestine is bound to the struggle against the global capitalist system: its local governments, states, and imperialist forces.

The growth of the current movement must be seen as part of the broader radicalization against systems of oppression, inequality, and racism, and for refugee rights. This process can in some ways be traced to 2008, when a deep crisis gripped the global capitalist system. The shock of the first major global economic crisis of the neoliberal period tore down the curtain of illusory progress to reveal how far-reaching and ugly are the structures of global capital. This epochal change occurred alongside the futile perpetuation of US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and in the same year as decimation was unleashed on Gaza by Israel in the first of its three deadly wars over a six-year period on the besieged area. The brutality of Operation Cast Lead, as Israel called it, was displayed around the world via social media, inspiring outrage and street demonstrations. This confluence of factors created space for a resurgence of activism around Palestine, first with campus activism and a broader solidarity movement reflected in the call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) against Israel. From 2011 to our current moment, the movement has expanded and reformed organically to fit the social and political tides of struggle. This unfurling can be understood in the context of mass struggles against austerity and racism: the Occupy movement, Black Lives Matter, the teachers' strike wave, the wildcat strikes of essential workers during COVID-19, and the rebellion against anti-Black racism and police terror. Together these struggles have played a critical role in buoying mass sympathy with Palestine and creating

the sea change we find ourselves in today. A new political vision and path forward are being formulated amid a polarized situation of both great gains and fierce reaction.

What to do

We hope this book is a contribution to the flowering sentiment of justice for Palestine that is blooming amid a political moment presenting massive challenges. A combination of the crisis of the world capitalist system, austerity measures, and the intensification of attacks on oppressed groups, including Palestinians, is producing this radicalization—more developed in some places than in others, and unevenly in all cases—in which we find ourselves. More than ever, these new activists see the wrongs they oppose as a common manifestation of a systemic problem: capitalism. The solution to this vampiric system is seen increasingly to be socialism. In the last three years, we've watched the idea of socialism go from being taboo to a recurring term debated in the mainstream news, in angry right-wing tirades, and in popular magazines like *Teen Vogue.* Numerous opinion polls reflect that, especially among people under thirty-five, "socialism" is as popular as capitalism, an astounding development in a country that is the capital of capitalism. This "red flowering" has progressed along a post-2008 timeline similar to the arc of the sentiment around Palestine.[2] It is this connection between the cause of Palestine and the struggle for socialism that we argue is necessary.

The recurring themes and concepts rooted in the foundation of this book are socialism and imperialism. As buzzwords can often be the bane of leftist political movements, we want to briefly clarify what we mean and what we don't mean by the terms that we use.

Socialism

What we mean when we say *socialism* is, simply put, a society where workers collectively own and democratically control their labor and the value they produce. In other words, a classless society, free of exploitation and oppression. Its essence is evoked in two common phrases of Marx, who described socialism as a world "from each according to their ability and to

each according to their need," which comes into realization through the "self-emancipation" of the working class.[3]

This is different from conceptions of socialism like the social democracy of the Scandinavian mixed economies, and different from the former USSR and North Korea—often referred to as Stalinist countries—or the current Chinese state, which can be generally described as a capitalist dictatorship with certain sectors of the economy owned by the state, whose role is to integrate the private sector into the world economy. All of these forms can be described as "socialism from above": state control of some part of industry through a top-down, bureaucratic, and more often than not authoritarian stratum of society.

Even though the USSR is now a thing of the past, the political tendency of Stalinism still exists and is referred to in chapters of this book. Although definitions vary, we will briefly describe it as a political tendency based on the false notion that socialism can be established in a single country rather than through the international rejection of capitalism. Stalinism often takes a rigid approach to socialist revolution, regarding it as marked by distinct "stages"—first, socialists fight for national or anticolonial liberation, then at some later date they start the struggle for socialism. This mechanistic model relegates the project of fighting for socialism to something that will take place at a future—often undefined—point in time. Following this "stagism" has taken a particular toll on the socialist and communist parties in the Middle East, as they have squandered attempts to build a socialist alternative.[4] For example, Khaled Bakdash, the "dean of Arab Communism" and past leader of the Syrian Communist Party, boasted in 1944 about his party's charter being completely "devoid of any mention of socialism." The charter contains, he continued, "not a single demand or expression tinged with socialism. It is nothing more and nothing less than a democratic national pact…. The revolution that our country must undergo is *not* a socialist revolution, but a national democratic revolution."[5]

This approach allied many of the communist parties in the region on the side of national unity instead of emphasizing the importance of internal *conflicts* between classes and seeing struggle from below, of the workers and the oppressed, as the answer.[6] Today, holdovers from Stalinist ways of thinking can be seen in those on the left who express support for

counterrevolutionary dictators like Bashar al-Assad, grotesquely defending his butchering of the popular struggle of Syrian people against his regime rather than taking a simple position both against US imperialism and against Assad.[7]

The socialism we mean stresses the need for struggle *from below* and that of *self-emancipation.* Similarly, this struggle must be an explicitly international one in its outlook, its actors, and its goal of global destruction of the regime of capital. Some in this book describe this approach as internationalist. This vision of socialism has been succinctly described by American socialist Hal Draper as "socialism from below":

> The heart of Socialism-from-Below is its view that socialism can be realized only through the self-emancipation of activated masses in motion, reaching out for freedom with their own hands, mobilized "from below" in a struggle to take charge of their own destiny, as actors (not merely subjects) on the stage of history.[8]

Imperialism

The word *imperialism* is commonly used as a synonym for a foreign policy of military might, war, and domination. Our definition is slightly different. We view imperialism as the unrelenting process of competition and conflict between the world's capitalist classes of different states, who are vying for domination and exploitation of the globe's people, wealth, and resources.[9] We see the major capitalist states as competing with each other and subjugating less powerful states and peoples to their rule. Our understanding of imperialism is rooted in the theories originally formulated by Marx, Lenin, and Bukharin, which see imperialism not as a policy *chosen* by states but as a system rooted in economics that *dictates* the policy of states. As Bukharin writes: "As war is nothing but 'the continuation of politics by other means,' so is politics nothing but the method of the reproduction of certain conditions of production."[10] While military might and conquest are the sharpest edge and most visible expression of this competition and subjectation, imperialism is not *only* carried out through the barrel of a gun. Economic tools are in some ways the preferred, "less messy" method implemented by institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and the policies of trade deals, zones, tariffs, and the like are also weapons the ruling classes use for domination. The ruling

classes pursue this economic and military violence—to quote Lenin—"not out of particular malice," but because the drive for expansion occurs in a world already divided up by capitalism and colonialism, one that makes it imperative that they "adopt this method in order to get profits."[11]

We do not understand imperialism—as some do—as a trait of only some camps of capitalist states and not other camps. If you have a ruling class integrated into the world economy, then that ruling class must compete, and it is driven into the structure of imperialism.[12] Obviously, there is a hierarchy of the world's states as they jockey for position, and states like the US, because of its economic and military power, are far more dominant than others. Understanding how imperialism and capitalism work together is key to not allying with despots and remaining on the side of the people who face the war and devastation created by the system.

Put simply, imperialism breeds war and devastates the working class and the oppressed all over the world. As long as capitalism exists, so will imperialism. We only need to look at what's happening in Yemen or Iraq to see proof of this. As we are living in the strongest imperialist country in the world, it's vitally important for us to strengthen and refine our anti-imperialist politics and inject them into all of our struggles—from women's liberation to immigrant rights—and make it clear that our struggles here in the US are intimately tied to the struggles of workers all over the world, including those of workers in countries that are being ruthlessly bombed or starved by the United States.[13]

A clear understanding of US imperialism and its aims is the only foundation for consistent opposition to US militarism, domestic and abroad. This means doing away with all the false rhetoric about fighting "terrorism," defeating dictators, or defending democracy. And, importantly, this means fighting against Islamophobia and right-wing attacks on immigrants and refugees. Anti-imperialism is the cornerstone that upholds the principle of internationalism. This means gaining a deep-rooted understanding of the fact that our bonds with others are not based on borders or nationalities but on the shared interest of workers and oppressed peoples in resisting oppression and exploitation by ruling classes worldwide. After all, our governments have taught us that they care more about profit than they do people.

Foundation to framing

With this as foundation we turn back to Palestine and the cause of liberation. In the pages of this book, we aim to convince you that an international socialist movement, from the bottom up, rooted in the workers and oppressed of this world, is the only path toward liberation for Palestine. Indeed, to be a socialist you must be a principled champion for Palestine.

Part one begins by laying out the roots of the struggle today, illuminating the Nakba and the political ideology at the root of Israel's settler-colonial project, Zionism. Next, we move to explain how the interests of the US ruling class are deeply invested in alignment and support for Israel as a core plank in the US imperial project. Part one ends by offering historical context for the Palestinian liberation movement spanning from the Nakba to the Second Intifada. Understanding this history is key to drawing lessons from the past and charting a course of struggle today.

Part two focuses more on the current contours of the struggle for Palestinian liberation, taking into account the various players today, starting with the history of the so-called peace process as an extension of the tentacles of neoliberalism. In this section, we will explain why, despite our insistence on global working-class solidarity as the only vehicle for freedom, the Israeli working class, with its fundamental ties to Israel's settler-colonial project, is not an ally of liberation. Last, we look at how the continuously winding revolutionary path of the Arab Spring has shaped this current moment of struggle.

In the third section we highlight the important dynamic of global solidarity. First, the BDS movement and its relation to shifting tides in the struggle. Second, the historical connection between the struggle for Palestine and the Black liberation struggle in the United States. Third, the overlapping dynamic of gender and conceptions of feminism within and beyond Palestine. This is by no means an exhaustive list of the many intersections of Palestine with other struggles against oppression, from Kashmir to Standing Rock.

In our conclusion, we attempt to draw these strands together to make the case for the need to connect the liberation of Palestine with a struggle against imperialism and global capitalism, both in a diagnosis of the situation and in a prescription for freedom. The tremendous force that will be needed to win that goal must not be constrained by the narrow confines

of the bourgeois state under the capitalist order. In this we look toward regional uprisings and global movements as the hope for the international working class to win freedom for Palestine—and, indeed, freedom for us all, from the river to the sea and across the entire world.

Spring 2020



Timeline

1517–1917: Palestine is a part of the Ottoman Empire.

1670: Mufti Khayr al-Din al-Ramli refers in legal documents to “our country” of Filastin (Palestine).

1917: British government publishes the Balfour Declaration, giving its support for the establishment of a Jewish national home in what was to become Mandate Palestine.

1920–48: Mandate Palestine (a geopolitical entity under British administration, carved out of Ottoman Southern Syria after the First World War).

1923: Founding of the Palestine Communist Party

1936–39: General strike begins years of “The Great Revolt” uprising for Arab independence and against increased immigration by Jewish settlers.

1943: Palestine Communist Party splits into two national parties: the National Liberation League and the Zionist MAKEI (Communist Party of Eretz Israel)

1947: UN Partition Plan (UN General Assembly proposes to divide Mandate Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state). Jewish Agency accepted the plan, while Arab leaders rejected it and indicated an unwillingness to accept any form of territorial division, arguing that it violated the principles of national self-determination in the UN Charter, which granted people the right to decide their own destiny.

May 15, 1948: Beginning of the Nakba. Israeli Declaration of Independence occurs the day before (Jewish leadership in the region of Palestine announces the establishment of the independent and sovereign State of Israel).

May 1948–January 1949: 1948 Arab–Israeli War (large-scale war between Israel and five Arab countries and the Palestinian Arabs). Israel wins and annexes territory beyond the borders of the proposed Jewish state and into the borders of the proposed Arab state and West Jerusalem. The result: The Gaza Strip and the West Bank were occupied by Egypt and Transjordan, respectively, until 1967.

1950: Israel passes the Law of Return and Absentee Property Law that confiscates Palestinian refugees' property and gives citizenship of the state of Israel to all people of Jewish faith or descent.

1956: Gamal Abdel Nasser becomes president of Egypt. Egypt nationalizes the Suez Canal.

1962: Algerian anticolonial struggle wins independence from France. **1964:** Founding of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

1967: The Six Day War (war between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon). The result, referred to by Arabs as the Naksa, is that Israel expands its territory significantly, taking Gaza and the Sinai from Egypt, the West Bank and Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. Founding of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Fateh joins the PLO.

1969: Arafat becomes chairman of PLO.

1970: Black September: Jordan represses the PLO presence in Jordan. The PLO relocates to Lebanon. Nasser dies; Anwar Sadat becomes president of Egypt.

1973: October War: Egypt and Syria attempt to retake Golan Heights and Sinai from Israel. Ultimately they lose the war but it sets in motion the Middle East Peace Plan.

1974: The Palestinian National Council adopts the Ten Point Program that paved the way for "two states" and the creation of a "national authority." PFLP and other left parties form the Rejectionist Front in opposition. The UN General Assembly recognizes the PLO as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people."

1976: Land Day: Strikes and protests in response to large expropriations of Palestinian land in the Galilee region.

1978: Camp David Accords: Egyptian president Anwar Sadat signs peace agreement and recognizes Israel. The PFLP ends the Rejectionist Front and rejoins PLO.

1982: The First Lebanon War. Israel invades southern Lebanon to crush the PLO. This culminates in the PLO evacuating Lebanon and moving to Tunisia. Massacre of thousands of Palestinians at the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camp in Lebanon, carried out by Lebanese fascists with support from IDF and Ariel Sharon.

1987–93: First Intifada (Palestinian uprising that takes place in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank against Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories).

1987: Founding of Hamas.

1988: PLO declares independent Palestinian state within 1967 borders, de facto recognizing Israel and "two states."

1993: Oslo process begins, starting the process of normalization of relations between Israel and the PLO, creation of the Palestinian Authority, and ceding of some administrative control of parts of the post-1967 Occupied Territories.

1994: Far-right Zionist terrorist and disciple of Meir Kahane massacres twenty-nine and injures 125 at the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron. In response, Hamas initiates its suicide-bombing campaign.

2000: Israel carries out targeted assassination of Hussein ‘Abayat and Khalid Salahat, initiating its public policy of assassination.

2000: The Second Intifada (Palestinian uprising that took place in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank against Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories).

2002: Israel begins construction of the 472-mile-long Apartheid Wall in the West Bank.

2004: Death of Yasser Arafat.

2005: Israel’s unilateral “disengagement plan” (Israel withdraws its army from Gaza and dismantles all its twenty-five Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip, relocating Jewish settlers to the occupied West Bank). Afterwards, Israel begins a blockade, exercising control over the external perimeter of Gaza by air, land, and sea, imposing strict limits on the passage of people and supplies.

2006: Hamas wins majority in Palestinian legislative elections. Second Lebanon War (Israeli military operation that kills 1,191 Lebanese and injures 4,409). Hamas officially abandons use of suicide attacks.

2007: National unity government breaks down and Fateh–Hamas conflict results in Gaza/West Bank political division.

December 2008–January 2009: Large-scale Israeli military offensive known as Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip kills 1,291 Palestinians.

December 2010: Beginning of Arab Spring.

November 2012: Operation Pillar of Cloud. IDF conducts a large-scale military operation in the Gaza Strip, killing 158 Palestinians (105 civilians). UN upgrades Palestine to “non-member observer state status.”

July – August 2014: Operation Protective Edge. IDF conducts a large-scale military operation in the Gaza Strip, killing 2,191 Palestinians.

2017: Trump recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moves the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

2018: Great March of Return begins on Land Day. Israeli Knesset adopts the “Nation-State” law, which stipulates “the right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish People.” The Trump administration closes PLO offices in Washington, DC.

2019: Trump officially recognizes Israeli sovereignty over occupied Golan Heights. US convenes the Bahrain Conference to lay out plans for normalization of relations between Israel and some Arab states.

2020: Trump releases his apartheid plan for Palestinians, dubbed the "Deal of the Century," which green-lights formal Israeli annexation of the West Bank.



Part 1

Circumstances Given and Transmitted from the Past



1

Roots of the Nakba

Zionist Settler Colonialism

Sumaya Awad & Annie Levin

Palestine before 1948: olive groves stretching across rolling hills dotting the land between mountains and the Mediterranean Sea. Orange groves, too, sprinkled by the hundreds around Jerusalem and Jaffa, weaving through smaller villages and towns, where agriculture kept entire Palestinian communities economically self-sufficient. Cinemas and theaters featuring new entertainment that rocked the world at the time. Cafes and bakeries, where Palestinians and people in transit from across the region filtered through on a daily basis on their way to school, a meeting, or a doctor's appointment with some of the finest physicians in the region. Each Palestinian city and town had an identity, a rich history and tradition, perhaps best reflected in unique *tatreez* patterns, or embroidery stitches attributed to different regions. Traditions of three different faiths existed side by side. A railway system connected Jerusalem to Damascus, and

Haifa to smaller towns and villages on the Palestinian coast, where workers traveled in droves to fill factories at the turn of the twentieth century. A vibrant trade port in Haifa welcomed ships crossing the Mediterranean with supplies and sent them off laden with produce and other goods. To the south, Palestine served as a direct route to North Africa, where, in the decades to come, revolutionaries would begin their struggle for independence from British, French, Spanish, and Italian colonizers.

It's easy to romanticize what existed before Israel was established and before systematic ethnic cleansing campaigns were organized to erase any semblance of Palestinian history, culture, and identity. What is today the Levant was not yet spliced into separate countries with outlined borders. That would come later, with pacts made with European imperialists staking their claims on the Middle East mainly through the Balfour Declaration and Sykes-Picot Agreement. Prior to these, borders differentiating Syria from Lebanon and the East and West banks of the Jordan River were porous, though not entirely ineffectual. Still, one thing is abundantly clear from historical accounts of Palestine before 1948: Palestinians existed; they thrived politically, culturally, and socially; and, like others across the global South, they were immersed in a sustained struggle for independence.

What is the Nakba and how must we talk about it?

The Nakba refers to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948, when, over a period of several months, Jewish militia groups known as the Irgun and Haganah conducted raids, massacres, and depopulation campaigns across Palestine—all under orders from Zionist leadership, which aimed to drive Palestinians out en masse. The Irgun and Haganah would later form the basis for Israel's military, the Israel Defense Forces. Through the Nakba, Israel established itself as a sovereign state on Palestinian land, and the world's largest refugee population to date was born. In a period characterized by independence and decolonization across the global South, Israel was founded as a settler-colonial state on occupied land.

In 1947–48, four hundred Palestinian villages were completely destroyed, replaced in many cases by illegal settlements, resorts, and parks—all of which Palestinians are barred from entering.[1] The term "catastrophe"—the literal translation of the word Nakba—cannot do justice to the aftermath of ethnic cleansing, when remembering the Nakba became

a punishable crime, “Palestinian” became synonymous with “terrorist,” and history was written to erase not just the identity of Palestinians but their humanity as well.

Crucial to the understanding of these events are the three decades of colonial expansion in Palestine and the broader Middle East following the First World War. In the early twentieth century, as the Yishuv[2] began to grow and the Balfour Declaration of 1917 was signed, legitimizing the Zionist project and its claim to Palestinian land, tensions began to fester. The following years saw the Zionist seizure of indigenous land, and the struggle for Palestine began. The British, after giving Zionist leaders approval and supporting the building of an exclusionary Jewish state, could not mediate a constructive plan or gain the trust of the Palestinians or the Arabs at large, whose lands had been carved up by Britain and other European colonial powers after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. In the late 1940s the United Nations intervened with the 1947 Partition Plan, which divided Palestinian land into areas designated for Jewish settlement and areas for Palestinians, legitimizing the Zionist claim to control over the land.

Plan Dalet, commonly referred to as Plan D, was the Haganah’s initiative to forcibly take over not only all areas allocated to the Jewish community by the United Nations resolution of 1947 but also any areas the Yishuv deemed critical to ensure the further expansion of the Jewish state on Palestinian land. The Haganah was divided into brigades, each with the responsibility of occupying a list of villages. Occupation most often entailed complete destruction. Few villages were left intact after Plan D had run its course. This was a deliberate campaign to raze all Palestinian homes, schools, and hospitals to the ground so there would be nothing left for Palestinians to return to. One of the most notorious of the Haganah militias was the Alexandroni Brigade. The brigade was given a list of sixty-four villages sprinkled between upper Haifa down to modern day Tel Aviv. On this list was the village of Tantoura.

In the 1940s, the village of Tantoura was a Palestinian coastal community on the shores of the Mediterranean. Its proximity to the sea tied the village’s economy to trade and commerce with neighboring Lebanon, and railroads integrated the village into the industry and agriculture of nearby Haifa. On May 22, 1948, Tantoura joined the approximately four

hundred other villages to be occupied, depopulated, and destroyed by the Haganah.

Teddy Katz, an Israeli student at Haifa University, chose to write about Tantoura for his masters thesis in 1998. The conclusion of Katz's project illuminated the mass execution of men, women, and children, predominantly between the ages of thirteen and thirty, at the hands of the Zionist militia, for no apparent reason other than their presence on land Israel sought to control:

> All of the men of Tantoura were taken to the cemetery of the village, and they put them in lines, and they ordered them to begin digging, and every line that finished digging just was shot and fell down to the holes. Which I guess reminds at least a few of you, something that had to do with Germans, three years after the end of the Second World War.[3]

The events in Tantoura amounted to the ethnic cleansing of an entire village and the murder of hundreds of innocent civilians. For his findings, Katz was punished by his university and sued by Haganah veterans. In the end, his research was removed from all Haifa University libraries and records. Of course, long before Katz, Palestinian historians have shed light on these atrocities, but their scholarly work has been cast aside, deemed too "subjective" and thus not credible, because rarely does history rely on the oppressed for truth. After Katz's trial, many of the Israeli army archives he had accessed for research were sealed from the public under the pretext of "security."

Although Nakba is often translated as "catastrophe," truthfully there is no accurate translation of the word. After all, how does one translate the attempted murder and destruction of an entire people? Whole families, homes, villages and towns, erased, gone. How does one translate massacres like Tantoura's, where Palestinian children watched as their fathers were lined up and shot before being thrown in a large pit—a pit the men were forced to dig hours before their death? How do you translate Deir Yassin, where nearly every Palestinian was killed, women raped, and then burned in their homes? Or Palestinian villages where Israeli commanders placed a bomb next to every home and then detonated the bombs all at once?

Major General (res.) Elad Peled recounted the events of the day to Israeli historian Boaz Lev Tov:

> What happened there, we came, we entered the village, planted a bomb next to every house, and afterward Homesh blew on a trumpet, because we didn't have radios, and that was the signal [for our forces] to leave. We're running in reverse, the sappers stay, they pull, it's all primitive. They light the fuse or pull the detonator and all those houses are gone.[4]

Golda Meir, one of the prominent Zionist leaders and architects of the 1948 ethnic cleansing, walked into the city of Haifa only days after Jewish militia raided the city and within hours expelled its inhabitants under threat of death. She recounted in her journal the horror and destruction she witnessed. In his book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Ilan Pappé details Meir's reaction:

> She at first found it hard to suppress a feeling of horror when she entered homes where cooked food still stood on the tables, children had left toys and books on the floor, and life appeared to have frozen in an instant. Meir had come to Palestine from the US, where her family had fled in the wake of pogroms in Russia, and the sights she witnessed that day reminded her of the worst stories her family had told her about the Russian brutality against Jews decades earlier.[5]

Twenty years later, Meir became the fourth prime minister of Israel.

Yigal Allon, a military commander during the 1948 ethnic cleansing and later a general in the Israel Defense Forces, was quoted in an early Israeli leader's diary defending the indiscriminate killing of *all* Palestinians:

> We need to be accurate about timing, place, and those we hit. If we accurse a family—we need to harm them without mercy, women and children included. Otherwise this is not an effective reaction. During the operation there is no need to distinguish between guilty and not guilty.[6]

Little has changed seven decades later. In April 2018, Israeli defense minister Avigdor Lieberman insisted, "There are no innocent people in Gaza," after a video surfaced that depicted an Israeli cackling and cheering as he used live ammunition against unarmed Palestinian protesters in the occupied strip.

The case of the village of Tantoura and hundreds of others like it are crucial to understanding the importance of remembering and naming the Nakba. Since 1948, Israel has systematically attempted to erase the events of the Nakba and, as such, the very identity of Palestinians. This erasure has been aided by orientalist tropes that deny Palestinian existence or argue that Palestinians can and should "blend in" with other Arabs in neighboring

countries. In order for Israel to establish itself, it needed to erase the identity of the indigenous population.

For an identity to be formed, it must be grounded in tradition and a shared notion of historical memory. Israel succeeded in fabricating both in order to create the Israeli citizen. In order for Israel to establish for itself a new and legitimate national identity, the other, the Palestinian, had to be excluded, and its history reformulated either to fit into the Israeli narrative or to be absorbed by surrounding Arab states. Palestinians have been robbed of the right to narrate their own past. This right to remember is made impossible by the Israeli state, through its censorship of textbooks, criminalization of Nakba commemoration, and refusal to acknowledge Palestinian self-determination and sovereignty. In fact, many critical documents from the period are under lock and key, accessible only to Israelis, if at all.

Defenders of Israel's version of history continuously seek to delegitimize Palestinian historians by claiming their work is too attached to the subject matter and too weak because of its reliance on oral narratives. What Israel does is to mobilize history in such a way that deviates from any intention to narrate what really happened, and instead to appropriate only those memories that serve its expansionist agenda. Erasing the Nakba is a key component of Israel's adamant refusal to allow Palestinians their internationally recognized right of return.

Many mainstream history books portray the Nakba as a "war" between two equal sides and either justify or ignore the massacres and displacement that accompanied the founding of the Israeli state. This argument on its own should give readers pause: no massacre, no displacement of an entire people should ever be justified, regardless of the context under which it occurred. Yet, even in following this skewed rationale, the argument falls flat—there were not two warring sides. There was an occupying foreign power and an indigenous population defending itself. There were two sides only insofar as there was an oppressor, a colonizing army; and an oppressed, a native population defending their homes, their families, and their land. Not only were the Zionist militias better armed, but in the early 1940s, they also received tactical and military training from British troops.[7]

Thus the absurdity of the Zionist saying that Palestine was "a land without a people for a people without a land." Every Zionist knew that the

main obstacle to founding their state was that the land they wanted for themselves was already inhabited. Arab Palestine was a flourishing society with a long-standing history and culture. There were more than a thousand villages, thriving towns, abundant citrus and olive groves, irrigation systems, crafts, and textiles. Zionists had to obliterate all traces of this society if they were to build a new one. As the Israeli defense minister Moshe Dayan admitted in a speech to Israeli students in 1969:

> We came here to a country that was populated by Arabs, and we are building here a Hebrew, Jewish state. Instead of Arab villages, Jewish villages were established. You do not even know the names of these villages and I do not blame you, because these geography books no longer exist. Not only the books, but all the villages do not exist. Nahalal was established in place of Mahalul, Gevat in place of Jibta, Sarid in the place of Hanifas and Kafr Yehoushu'a in the place of Tel Shamam. There is not a single Jewish settlement not established in the place of a former Arab village.[8]

The Palestinian Nakba is not only the compilation of the massacres of 1948 and the subsequent establishment of an Israeli state; it also comprises the occupation of Palestine's land, the erasure of its people, and the physical and cultural attempt to destroy its history and identity. In this sense, the Nakba is reminiscent of the United States' dispossession and erasure of indigenous Americans, from the colonization of "New England" to the Trail of Tears, and until today.

The Palestinian Nakba is neither a distant occurrence nor a completed history, and treating it as such only reproduces the Israeli contention that Palestine and Palestinians are romanticized representations of the past. The Nakba is not situated fully in the past, nor is it fully in the present: it transcends the notion of linear, progressive, and positivist history. It is a continuous and complex struggle against occupation, against apartheid, against erasure. It is the daily physical and abstract dispossession of land, identity, culture, and history. It has not ended. And for precisely this reason, the Israeli state has sought to penalize the remembrance of the Nakba. In 2011, Israel introduced the Nakba Law, which authorized the state to withhold funding from any public institution that mourns or commemorates the Nakba.

The looming threat of yet another mass expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland is ever present, especially today. The Nakba is just as present and significant as it was in 1948. Treating it otherwise is to succumb to Israel's fabricated narrative of a long forgotten past from which

it has progressed. Naming and remembering the Nakba is the most basic precondition for building a movement that can effectively resist the racism and erasure at the heart of Israel's settler-colonist project.

Equally important as confronting the Nakba is coming to terms with the historical developments that led to the crisis of 1948. Foremost among these are the emergence of Zionism and the Zionist movement, the basic principles of which have given the Israeli state an enduring ideological justification for its colonization of Palestine.

What is Zionism?

On July 19, 2018, the Israeli Knesset approved the Basic Law: Israel as the Nation State of the Jewish People, backed by the far-right government of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The so-called Basic Laws in Israel serve as the country's constitution and have never been overturned by the Supreme Court. The 2018 law enshrines at least three important tenets of Zionism: first, that the "right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people," in other words, that the right to self-determination does not apply to Palestinians. Second, that the state language is officially Hebrew, downgrading Arabic to a language with "special status." Third, "The state views the development of Jewish settlement as a national value and will act to encourage and promote its establishment and consolidation."

Israeli Marxist and anti-Zionist Moshe Machover described these laws in this way:

> Very simply, it is about legitimation. It attempts to legitimise the Zionist state not as the political expression of its own citizens, or even that of its Hebrew majority, but as the nation-state of a fictitious, worldwide Jewish "nation." It implies that the nation state of Jews anywhere is not determined by their place of birth, or long residence, or citizenship, or personal choice, but willy-nilly is the Zionist state, which claims to represent all Jews and act on their behalf, whether they like it or not.[9]

We need to look honestly at the history of Zionism, a movement that has allied itself in every case and at every moment in its history with the powers of world imperialism; a project that has built its very existence on the colonization of another people, the Palestinian people, on the obliteration of their history, their culture, and their land.

Vladimir Jabotinsky, one of the founding fathers of the Zionist movement, wrote in 1923:

> Zionism is a colonizing adventure and therefore it stands or falls by the question of armed force. It is important to build, it is important to speak Hebrew, but, unfortunately, it is even more important to be able to shoot—or else I am through with playing at colonization.[10]

In recent years we have seen a more robust Jabotinsky defense of Israeli expansion and the abandoning of pretense to being a democratic state. The 2018 Basic Law reflects this, as do the facts on the ground: the aggressive moves to destroy the Palestinian population, the murders of children by settlers, the repression against the Great March of Return. The war crimes, as well as the persistent organizing of campaigns to boycott Israel, operating alongside groups like Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), have begun to turn a new generation of young Jews around the world—and especially in the United States—against the idea that Israel is a Jewish homeland. We have seen young Jews criticize and reject the racist Birthright tours, which guarantee a free trip to Israel for any Jew in the world to enjoy their "birthright" while Palestinians who have lived in exile from the land of their birth are denied the right to return.

The roots of modern-day Zionism

Zionism is not a historic "yearning to return to Zion" but a modern movement that was born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The development of Zionism as a political movement was entirely a product of European society in the age of imperialism, and it is impossible to understand outside of this context.

Modern Jewish history begins with the French Revolution. In the wake of its revolutionary ideals of "liberty, equality, and brotherhood," Jews won emancipation throughout Western Europe. The old ghetto walls were torn down. Jews gained new civil rights and were able to join professions that had been closed to them for generations. The vast majority of European Jews welcomed emancipation. They *wanted* to be able to assimilate and participate as equal members in society.

But emancipation never reached Eastern Europe, where the majority of the world's Jewish population lived. In the Tsarist Empire, Jews lived in poverty and isolation, confined to industrially undeveloped areas in Poland

and the Ukraine called the Pale of Settlement. There was no heavy industry in the Pale, so most Jews worked in small shops or were part of the permanently unemployed. Life in the Pale was punctuated by the bloody pogroms—violent riots against Jewish communities that were stoked by government officials and local police. The Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky described the pogroms of 1905:

> A hundred of Russia's towns and townlets were transformed into hells. A veil of smoke was drawn across the sun. Fires devoured entire streets with their houses and inhabitants. This was the old order's revenge for its humiliation.[11]

The rise of industrial capitalism across Europe did not bring with it an end to antisemitism. On the contrary, the system's violent economic booms and slumps created a climate in which Jews became easy scapegoats for the immiseration of the population. The 1880s saw a resurgence of antisemitism in Europe, both East and West. Over the next three decades, more than five million Jews left Eastern Europe. Most of these refugees went to Western Europe or to the United States. Significantly, only a few thousand chose to go to Palestine.

In Western Europe, a prolonged economic crisis in the 1870s also led to a revival of antisemitism. Jews who had been safe and prosperous in those countries for over a generation were shocked to find themselves targets of this virulent racism. For many it shattered their faith in the capitalist system and set them on the road for alternatives. Millions of Jews joined the rising revolutionary socialist movements.

This revival of antisemitism also provided the context for Zionism to grow. Until the 1880s, the Zionist movement had consisted of a handful of fanatical religious sects. Jews who were enjoying the fruits of emancipation felt no need for religious utopias. For example, in 1862, Moses Hess, a Marxist turned Zionist, wrote a book called *Rome and Jerusalem.* It's now considered a Zionist classic, but at the time of its publication, most Jews, if they had heard of Hess at all, dismissed him as a crank. In its first year, the book sold only 160 copies, and the publisher asked that Hess buy back the remainder.

The revival of antisemitism in the late 1800s was epitomized by the Dreyfus Affair, in which the French government framed and convicted a Jewish army officer for treason. The 1894 trial of Captain Alfred Dreyfus

triggered an international movement against antisemitism. But for an Austrian journalist named Theodor Herzl, who covered the trial in France, the Dreyfus Affair meant that no matter how assimilated Jews were in society, they would never be safe until they had a state of their own. In 1896, Herzl published *The State of the Jews*, the manifesto for a new political Zionist movement.

Herzl's "political Zionism" was secular and pragmatic. He argued that the Jewish state could be built only under the patronage of one of the imperialist powers. Because the Jews would inevitably be a minority wherever they settled, and since they would incur the hostility of whatever indigenous population they were colonizing, they could not succeed without the big guns of a big imperialist power backing them up. In fact, Palestine was only one of several territories Herzl considered for colonization. Argentina, Uganda, Cyprus, and even a couple of states in the Midwest of the United States were discussed as possible locations for the Jewish state. But the religious faction in the Zionist movement fought hard for Palestine, and Herzl, never one to overlook the power of a symbol, agreed that the ancient Jewish "homeland" would give the movement more emotional power.

However, the defining feature of Zionism was not the choice of Palestine but the Zionists' willingness to ally with European imperialism to achieve their goals. Herzl rejected the most progressive ideals of the nineteenth century—democracy, socialism, republicanism—and instead embraced the most reactionary—monarchy, nationalism, chauvinism, and racism. Zionism identified with the imperialist powers that carved up the globe and accepted racist ideas about the "civilizing" virtues of colonization and "the white man's burden."

In *The Jewish State*, Herzl wrote:

> The unthinking might, for example, imagine that this exodus would have to take its way from civilization into the desert. That is not so! It will be carried out entirely in the framework of civilization. We shall not revert to a lower stage, we shall rise to a higher one. We shall not dwell in mud huts; we shall build new, and more beautiful, more modern houses, and possess them in safety…. We should there form a part of a wall of defense for Europe in Asia, an outpost of civilization against barbarism…. [Europe] would have to guarantee our existence.[12]

Israel and its supporters have long claimed that it is the only democracy in the Middle East. But democracy was *not* the political system that Herzl

envisioned for the Jewish state. Throughout his career, Herzl was deeply impressed by the power and authority of kings. After a meeting with the German Kaiser, Herzl wrote in his diary that the Kaiser "has truly imperial eyes—I have never seen such eyes. A remarkable bold, inquisitive soul shows in them." And it is clear from his diaries that Herzl saw himself taking his place among the European rulers at the head of a Jewish state. He once wrote, with typical humility:

> On Sunday, while I sat on the platform… I saw and heard the rising of my legend. The people are sentimental; the masses do not see clearly…. A light mist has begun to beat about me, which will perhaps deepen into a cloud in the midst of which I shall walk…. [A]t least they understand that I mean well by them, I am the man of the poor.[13]

Zionism and the Jews

If one of the defining features of Zionism was its identification with imperial power, another was the way Herzl and founders of the movement viewed the very Jews they claimed to represent. The writings of Herzl and his colleague Max Nordau are littered with descriptions of European Jews as parasites, social diseases, germs, aliens. They were frustrated and bewildered that most Jews wanted to assimilate and live in their countries of birth. To these men who worshipped power and privilege, the desperate poverty of the Jews of Eastern Europe was a sign of weakness in the Jewish character. Nordau wrote:

> I contemplate with horror the future development of this race of [assimilated Jews of Europe] which is sustained morally by no tradition, whose soul is poisoned with hostility to both its own and to strange blood, and whose self respect is destroyed through the ever present consciousness of a fundamental lie…. This is the picture of the Jewish people at the end of the nineteenth century. To sum up: the majority of Jews are a race of accursed beggars.[14]

Nordau's repulsive views flowed quite logically from Zionism's basic assumptions about Jews. Zionists accepted the nineteenth-century view that antisemitism—in fact, all racial (or ethnic) animosity—was a permanent feature of human nature. For this reason it was pointless to struggle against it. In their view, the solution for Jews was to form a state and convince the European world that Jews belonged to the class of the "superior" colonizers, not that of the colonized. It was a very short jump from this belief to concluding that Jews themselves were the cause of antisemitism.

Herzl accepted the idea that Jews were an economic burden on society, that their very presence provoked violence from the rest of society. He wrote:

> Wherever [the Jewish Question] does not exist, it is brought in together with Jewish immigrants. We are naturally drawn into those places where we are not persecuted and our appearance there gives rise to persecution. This is the case, and will inevitably be so, everywhere…. The unfortunate Jews are now carrying the seeds of anti-Semitism into England; they have already introduced it into America…. [But once Jews go to Palestine] the countries of emigration will rise to a new prosperity. There will be an inner migration of Christian citizens in to the positions relinquished by Jews. The outflow will be gradual, without any disturbance, and its very inception means the end of anti-Semitism…. Once we begin to execute the plan, anti-Semitism will cease at once and everywhere…. It is the relief from the old burden, under which all have suffered.[15]

Zionism and imperialism

To acquire the land for his state, Herzl was willing to beg from the table of every imperialist power, no matter how criminal. He courted them all—the German Kaiser, the Turks, the Russian Tsar, and the British Empire. In 1896, Herzl entered into negotiations with the Turkish sultan of the Ottoman Empire, which had ruled over Palestine for more than five hundred years. Herzl offered the Sultan a deal: in exchange for giving Palestine to the Jews, the Zionist movement would help soften world condemnation of Turkey for its genocidal campaign against the Armenians. He even pledged to meet with Armenian leaders to convince them to call off their resistance struggle!

As it turned out, the sultan rejected the offer. But, as historian Lenni Brenner notes:

> It would have occurred to no one else in the broad Jewish world to have tried to hinder or interfere with the Armenians in their struggle; nor would anyone have thought to support Turkey in any of its wars, and in the end Zionism gained nothing by its actions. But what was demonstrated, early in its history, was that there were no criteria of ordinary humanism that the World Zionist Organization considered itself bound to respect.[16]

Herzl never met a butcher he didn’t like, even if they were guilty of slaughtering Jews. In 1903, he went to the Russian tsar to see if he could convince Russia to pressure the Ottomans into handing over Palestine. In an infamous meeting, Herzl actually sat down with Count von Plehve, a man credited with helping to organize some of the most violent pogroms in the Tsarist empire in the early nineteenth century. Herzl argued with von Plehve

that Zionism was the solution to Russia's "Jewish problem," namely, the enormous number of Jews who were flooding into revolutionary organizations. Herzl later recalled that he told von Plehve, "Help me reach land sooner and the revolt will end. And so will the defection to the socialists."[17]

Herzl then met with a member of the Russian Social Revolutionary party, Chaim Zhitlovsky, in a bid to persuade him to accept his plan for Palestine. Zhitlovsky rejected Herzl's proposal, offering instead a response that epitomizes the revolutionary socialist position on Zionism:

> We Jewish revolutionaries, even the most national among us, are not Zionists, and do not believe that Zionism is able to resolve our problem…. The situation of Zionism is already dubious enough by the very fact of its standing aloof from the revolution. Its situation in Jewish life would become impossible if it could be shown that it undertakes positive steps to damage the Jewish revolutionary struggle.[18]

Herzl's meeting with von Plehve turned out to be a tactical disaster, alienating the very Russian Jews he was trying to recruit to the movement. Chaim Weizmann, president of the World Zionist Organization, later wrote:

> In general West European Jewry thinks that the majority of East European Jewish youth belongs to the Zionist camp. Unfortunately, the contrary is true. The lion's share of the youth is anti-Zionist, not from an assimilationist point of view as in West Europe, but rather as a result of their revolutionary mood. It is impossible to describe how many became the victims of police oppression because of membership in the Jewish Social Democracy—they are sent to jail and left to rot in Siberia; 5,000 are under state surveillance… and I am not speaking only of the youth of the proletariat…. Almost the entire Jewish student body stands firmly behind the revolutionary camp … and all this is accompanied by a distaste for Jewish nationalism which borders on self-hatred.[19]

Herzl's movement held its first congress in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897. After that, waves of Zionist pioneers started migrating into Palestine. Zionist settler colonialism did not come to exploit the Arabs but instead sought to completely replace them. The goal was to create an exclusively Jewish state with a Jewish majority. In order to achieve this, Zionists had to destroy the Palestinian economy, steal the land, drive the Arabs out of the labor market, and erase the very memory they'd ever been there. This meant carrying out a war on a number of fronts, reflected in the three slogans of the pioneer Zionists: "conquest of land," "conquest of labor," and "produce of the land."[20]

By "conquest of land," they meant to buy and steal as much Arab land as possible; by "conquest of labor," to force Jewish landowners to employ Jewish-only labor and organize Jewish-only trade unions to dominate the labor market; and by "produce of the land," to boycott and physically harass Palestinians' farms and businesses to drive them out.

"The iron wall of English bayonets"

The First World War and the Russian Revolution caused the collapse of Herzl's three beloved patrons, the Ottoman Empire, German Kaiser, and Russian tsar. Though the Zionists played all sides covertly during the war, the more farsighted leaders anticipated that Britain would emerge from the war as the dominant imperialist power.

When the war ended, Palestine became a British colony, and the Zionists found they shared many interests with their new colonial masters. In 1917 Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, the first official recognition of the Zionist settlements in Palestine. Under the British Mandate government, Britain privileged the small Jewish population over the Palestinians. In 1917 there were 56,000 Jews in Palestine and 644,000 Palestinians. Nonetheless, Britain gave 90 percent of concessions for projects like building roads and power plants to Jewish capitalists, and by 1935, Zionists owned 872 out of the 1,212 industrial firms in Palestine.[21]

The British ruling class, which was rabidly antisemitic, had its own reasons for this support. Out of the First World War, Arab nationalism had emerged as a major threat to British domination of the Middle East, and Britain hoped that Zionists could be a useful force for policing the Arabs. But Winston Churchill gave another reason for supporting Zionism: defeat of the left-wing "international Jews." In an astoundingly antisemitic article titled "Zionism versus Bolshevism," Churchill wrote:

> From the days of Spartacus … to those of Karl Marx, and down to Trotsky (Russia), Bela Kun (Hungary), Rosa Luxemburg (Germany), and Emma Goldman (United States), this worldwide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilization and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence, and impossible equality, has been steadily growing…. It becomes, therefore, specially important to foster and develop any strongly marked Jewish movement which leads directly away from these fatal associations. And it is here that Zionism has such a deep significance for the whole world at the present time…. [S]hould there be created in our own lifetime by the banks of the Jordan a Jewish State under the protection of the British Crown, which might comprise

> three or four millions of Jews, an event would have occurred in the history of the world which would, from every point of view, be beneficial, and would be especially in harmony with the truest interests of the British Empire.[22]

In 1936, the Palestinians began the Great Arab Revolt against British and Zionist colonization. The revolt lasted three years and was only defeated by savage British repression—drawing in at some points half the British military.[23]

Zionists organized armed militias, called the Haganah, and paramilitary units, which played an important supporting role in crushing the revolt. They also took advantage of the Palestinian general strike to gain control of new sectors of the economy, replacing more Palestinian owners and workers with Jews. The British military repression was so severe that it left the Palestinian population demoralized and exhausted for many years.

This cleared the field for the Zionists to focus on the last remaining obstacle to a Jewish state: the British Mandate itself. After all, the Zionists were colonizers and had no intention of remaining subjects in someone else's colony. In 1945, they declared war on the British with the intention of seizing full control over the mandate territories. In 1947, the United Nations imposed its criminal partition of Palestine, which granted the majority of the land to the minority of Jewish settlers. For the Zionists, this was a green light to begin the ethnic cleansing of the Nakba.

"I would not accept Arabs in my trade union"

Many of the leaders, like Herzl, were extremely hostile to socialism. But Marxism was enormously influential in the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. If Zionism was going to build in that atmosphere, it had to make some accommodation. Ber Borochov was the father of the movement called "proletarian Zionism," which, as its name implies, tried to synthesize Marxism and Jewish nationalism. Borochov's supposedly Marxist analysis was that, because the Jewish proletariat of Eastern Europe worked in economically marginal jobs, they had no social power as workers. Therefore they were powerless to effect change in Russia. Thus, Jewish workers needed to go build their own nation, where they could become a "real" proletariat, organized in the real centers of production. Only then could they make a socialist revolution. In the meantime, they might have to

make some alliances, temporarily of course, with Jewish capitalists. In reality this was just giving a pseudo-Marxist gloss to the same pessimistic message that Zionism is all about: *You can't fight here at home against oppression; you must organize to go to Palestine and build the state.*

The organization Borochov founded, the Workers of Zion (Po'ale Zion), actually played a reactionary role in the Russian labor movement. Zionists in the unions argued against any and all united action with non-Jewish workers, which in effect put them in the position of strikebreakers. Here was a party claiming to represent Jewish workers that opposed the struggles of Jewish workers! In 1901, members of the Bund, the Jewish revolutionary organization that was bitterly hostile to Zionism, organized to drive the Zionists out of their unions.

In Palestine, the racist "socialist Zionists" built organizations that were invaluable to the process of colonization. They founded the Histadrut, the Jewish-only trade union federation, which organized the exclusion of Arab workers from the job market. They started the *kibbutzim*, the agricultural collectives that built exclusively Jewish settlements on Palestinian land and defended those settlements with arms. The reality of "Zionist Marxism" is that it had to stretch Marxism beyond all recognition to justify its colonial project. David Hacohen, a Labor Party leader, recalled the ideological difficulties in 1969:

> I had to fight my friends on the issue of Jewish socialism, to defend the fact that I would not accept Arabs in my trade union, the Histadrut; to defend preaching to housewives that they not buy at Arab stores; to defend the fact that we stood guard at orchards to prevent Arab workers from getting jobs there…. To pour kerosene on Arab tomatoes, to attack Jewish housewives in the markets and smash the Arab eggs they had bought.[24]

"The iron wall of Jewish bayonets"

If the Jewish-only trade unions and kibbutzim were the organizations of the Zionist "left," then Revisionism, under the leadership of Vladimir Jabotinsky, formed the right wing of the movement. Jabotinsky called his faction Revisionism because it "revised" what he saw as the weaknesses of the movement, its willingness to negotiate with British imperialism, to accept concessions on key questions like immigration and land seizure. In particular, Jabotinsky was quite open and blunt about how Zionists should deal with "the Arab question":

> Thus we conclude that we cannot promise anything to the Arabs of the Land of Israel or the Arab countries. Their voluntary agreement is out of the question. Hence those who hold that an agreement with the natives is an essential condition for Zionism can now say "no" and depart from Zionism. Zionist colonization, even the most restricted, must either be terminated or carried out in defiance of the will of the native population. This colonization can, therefore, continue and develop only under the protection of a force independent of the local population—an iron wall which the native population cannot break through. This is, in toto, our policy towards the Arabs. To formulate it any other way would only be hypocrisy.[25]

Revisionists were openly sympathetic to fascism. Betar, the Revisionist youth movement, admired Mussolini. They wore brown shirts and did the fascist salute.[26] The Revisionist newspaper carried a regular column called "From the Notebook of a Fascist," and on one occasion when Jabotinsky came to Palestine, the newspaper ran a column titled, "On the Arrival of Our Duce."[27] In 1933 a columnist wrote, "Social democrats of all stripes believe that Hitler's movement is an empty shell [but] we believe that there is both a shell and a kernel. The antisemitic shell is to be discarded, but not the anti-Marxist kernel."[28]

The Labor Zionists tried at times to distance themselves from the actions of the extremist paramilitaries. But when the time came for united action, they showed that their squabbles were all in the family. As Jabotinsky put it, "Force must play its role—with strength and without indulgence. In this, there are no meaningful differences between our militarists and our vegetarians. One prefers an Iron Wall of Jewish bayonets; the other an Iron Wall of English bayonets."[29] It was Jabotinsky who founded the Haganah and the Revisionists who formed the paramilitary organizations—the Irgun as well as the fascist Stern Gang. In 1945 the Revisionists and the Labor Zionists united to form the Resistance Movement to wage war against the British and then the Palestinians. The Irgun and the Stern Gang were responsible for the infamous massacre in the village of Deir Yassin in 1948. At least until the 1980s, veterans of the Irgun still returned to Deir Yassin to commemorate their "heroism."[30]

Zionism and the Holocaust

Zionism's most powerful claim to legitimacy is that the State of Israel is necessary to prevent another Holocaust. The legacy of the Holocaust is

invoked to justify every atrocity committed by Israel. But it is precisely the record of how the Jewish Agency (the Zionist leadership governing Jewish settlements in Palestine before the establishment of Israel in 1948) responded to the Holocaust that provides the most damning evidence against Zionism.

To the leaders of the Jewish Agency, the rise of fascism had a definite upside. Menahem Ussishkin told a Zionist Executive meeting, "There is something positive in their tragedy and that is that Hitler oppressed them as a race and not as a religion. Had he done the latter, half the Jews in Germany would simply have converted to Christianity."[31] In 1934, Labor Zionist Moshe Beilinson went to Germany and reported back to the Labor Party, "The streets are paved with more money than we have ever dreamed of in the history of our Zionist enterprise. Here is an opportunity to build and flourish like none we have ever had or ever will have."[32] Specifically, "the opportunity" meant the potential for thousands of new immigrants and their assets to come flooding into Palestine.

However, Zionist officials were quite blunt in stating that they didn't want *all* the refugees from Hitler's Holocaust. They didn't want the burden of absorbing millions of impoverished sick refugees who had no ideological passion for Palestine. The agency only wanted young, healthy Jews who could come over to work and fight and build the state. As Israeli historian Tom Segev writes:

> Urban life was, in their [Zionist leaders'] eyes, a symptom of social and moral degeneration; returning to the land would give birth to the "new man" they hoped to create in Palestine. In parceling out the immigration certificates, they therefore gave preference to those who could play a role in their program for building the country. They preferred healthy young Zionists.[33]

The German Immigrants Association in Palestine actually complained in 1934 that the Zionist organizations in Berlin weren't being selective enough about whom they were sending. Its letter of complaint stated, in part, "The human material coming from Germany is getting worse and worse."[34] It even returned some of the refugees to Germany who they felt would be too much of a burden.

The Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency wrote a private memorandum in 1943 about the prospects for their work. At the time this

was written, it still could have been possible to save millions of Jews from Hitler's Final Solution. But they didn't even try:

> Whom to save: Should we help everyone in need, without regard to the quality of the people? Should we not give this activity a Zionist national character and try foremost to save those who can be of use to the Land of Israel and to Jewry? I understand that it seems cruel to put the question in this form, but unfortunately we must state that if we are able to save only 10,000 people from among 50,000 who can contribute to build the country … as against saving a million Jews who will be a burden, or at best an apathetic element, we must restrain ourselves and save the 10,000 that can be saved from among the 50,000—despite the accusations and pleas of a million.[35]

Was this position unethical? To paraphrase Jabotinsky, this *was* their ethic—there was no other ethic. To the Zionists, the needs of the Jewish State came first, second, and last.

The refugees who did make it to Palestine were treated with contempt by the press and public. They were seen as passive victims whose families perished because they failed to stand up for themselves. One German immigrant wrote to the German language press, "We have seen Germany's nationalism gone mad and we trembled; we are on the road to a similar situation here."[36]

The bottom line was that the Jewish Agency in Palestine had many opportunities to rescue tens of thousands of Jews and perhaps more. But they sabotaged proposal after proposal, choosing to spend their money on land settlements instead of rescue. David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, said, "It is the job of Zionism not to save the remnant of Israel in Europe but rather to save the land of Israel for the Jewish people and the Yishuv."[37]

Chaim Weizmann, the first president of Israel, was even more blunt:

> The hopes of Europe's six million Jews are centered on emigration. I was asked: "Can you bring six million Jews to Palestine?" I replied "No."… From the depths of the tragedy I want to save … young people [for Palestine]. The old ones will pass. They will bear their fate or they will not. They are dust, economic and moral dust in a cruel world…. Only the branch of the young shall survive. They have to accept it.[38]

In the 1950s, a dramatic court case in Israel revealed that the Zionists had acted with criminal neglect—if not outright complicity—in the destruction of Hungarian Jewry.[39] Evidence produced at the trial showed

that Rudolph Kastner, a top official in the Israeli Labor Party and the person in charge of the Rescue Committee in Hungary during the war, had actively collaborated with the Nazis. Kastner negotiated with Nazi official Adolph Eichmann (one of the architects of the Holocaust) to get approval for a "VIP train" of 1,685 Hungarian Jews to leave Hungary safely. Kastner personally selected the passengers for the train, which included several hundred people from his hometown and a dozen members of his family. He worked with SS officer Kurt Becher to make the financial arrangements. In exchange for the safe passage of the train, Kastner agreed not to warn the Jews of Hungary (whose rescue was in his hands) about Hitler's plans for their extermination and not to take any action to protect them. Worse, he helped to deceive Hungarian Jews, convincing them that they were simply being relocated. After the war, Kastner testified at the Nuremberg trials on Becher's behalf, which resulted in Becher, murderer of half a million Hungarian Jews, going free. Most damning of all, it became clear that Kastner had not acted alone but that his plan for the VIP train had the support of the highest leaders of the Jewish Agency.

Toward the end of the war a staunch anti-Zionist, Rabbi Dov Michael Weissmandel, met with high-level Nazi officials to make a desperate deal. The Nazis knew they were losing the war and needed cash. They told Weismandel that the remaining Jews could buy their freedom for a large sum of money. The Nazis gave Weissmandel a deadline to come up with that money. Weissmandel flooded the Zionist organizations with his pleas, but they chose to do nothing. The deadline passed. In an agonizing letter to the Jewish Agency, Weissmandel wrote:

> Why have you done nothing until now? Who is guilty of this frightful negligence? Are you not guilty, our Jewish brothers: you who have the greatest good fortune in the world—liberty? … Twelve thousand Jews—men, women, and children, old men, infants, healthy and sick ones, are to be suffocated daily…. Their destroyed hearts cry out to you for help as they bewail your cruelty.[40]

The Nazis murdered the Jewish revolutionary left in Europe; they wiped out its best leaders and organizations. It was these socialists and communists who helped to organize the underground resistance to fascism in countries across Europe, who fought bravely to defend the Warsaw Ghetto against the Nazi assault. With the destruction of these fighters went the memory of what they had accomplished and stood for. It is vital to start with this fact

because Zionism has profited enormously from our historical amnesia. The destruction of the strong anti-Zionist tradition among European Jews has meant that Zionism has been able to claim that it represents the unified voice of Jews throughout the world; therefore, anyone who opposes them is an antisemite.

We don't learn that, up until the Second World War, vast numbers of Jews supported the parties of revolutionary socialism—a tradition that opposed Zionism. In 1905, the anti-Zionist Bund, the revolutionary organization of Jewish workers, condemned Zionism both for its solution to antisemitism and for its colonization of Arabs. In 1910, the Jewish socialist Karl Kautsky wrote:

> It is labor that gives people a right to the land in which it lives, thus Judaism can advance no claim on Palestine. On the basis of the right of labor and of democratic self-determination, today Palestine does not belong to the Jews of Vienna, London, or New York, who claim it for Judaism, but to the Arabs of the same country, the great majority of the population.[41]

It is not hard to see why many Jews were hostile to Zionism. Zionism called for a retreat from the struggle against antisemitism. But the socialist movement argued that the fight against antisemitism was central to the revolutionary struggle against capitalism. Thus on one side stood the revolutionaries who organized Jews and non-Jews together to fight the pogroms, lead strikes, and overthrow the tsarist regime that perpetuated Jewish oppression. On the other side stood the Zionists who collaborated with the tsar and his butchers, stood aside from the struggles for self-defense, and sabotaged work in the unions. It was the revolutionary workers' movement—not Zionism—that offered a genuine hope for liberation for European Jews.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks took an uncompromising position against antisemitism, seeing it as a source of weakness in the Russian working class. Lenin argued that socialists must be the tribune of the oppressed, willing to fight every instance of antisemitism, regardless of what class of Jews were affected. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks abolished all racist laws against Jews and severely punished incidents of antisemitism. During the civil war, the imperialist-backed White Army in the Ukraine murdered as many as sixty thousand Jews while the Bolshevik

Red Army became the protector of the Jewish communities in Poland and the Ukraine.

Today

The inherent racism and violence of the Zionist project is very much alive today. The number of right-wing governments and parties closely allied with Israel today is astounding, from Jair Bolsonaro's neofascist government in Brazil to Narendra Modi's ethnonationalist regime in India. It is a fact that Israel is at the forefront of the international far right, forming alliances with European political figures who themselves at times invoke antisemitic tropes or sit silently as virulent racist mobs rally in their streets. Italy's Matteo Salvini and Hungary's Viktor Orbán are just two examples. Israel has even provided arms to neo-Nazi militias in Ukraine.[42] Zionism is no longer affiliated with Judaism alone. In fact, today groups like Christians United for Israel, an organization with more than five million members, represent the largest drivers of US support for Israel.

Just as almost a century ago, Zionist leaders remain largely silent in the face of attacks against Jews by the allies of Zionism. On August 14, 2019, a prison guard working for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) drove a truck through a crowd of Jewish protesters, organized by Never Again, calling for an end to the unlawful detention of immigrant children in ICE concentration camps on the US–Mexico border. In fact, ICE agents are trained in Israel through joint US-funded workshops and conferences.[43] Additionally, the surveillance technology used to capture and detain immigrants and refugees crossing the US–Mexico border is Israeli, tried and tested on Palestinians under occupation.

We should not underestimate the influence of xenophobia and Islamophobia in the growing alliance between Israel and the international far right. The rampant Islamophobia funneled into our society, the discourse about the "good" and "bad" Muslim: these concepts are meant to further vilify Muslims and Arabs at large and paint them as regressive, irrational, and violent. In turn, these propagandistic images are used by Israel to justify its repression, torture, and murder of Palestinians on a daily basis, both in Palestine and abroad. These tactics are shared by ICE, which

conjures images of "bad" immigrants to justify the deportation of hundreds of thousands of immigrants and refugees.

For decades, segments of the far right in the US have cozied up to Israel under the cover of the bipartisan support that Israel relies on. This relationship has been exposed under the Trump administration, which has not only emboldened white supremacist groups but also offered them a platform to publicly vocalize their ideology. With little pushback from other segments of the US establishment, these groups—including Act for America, Identity Evropa, and the Ku Klux Klan—flaunt their racist rhetoric, which quickly incites very real violence against Black and brown communities across the United States. Israel does more than legitimize these groups; it acts as an inspiration and example of the ethnonationalist state to which they aspire. White nationalist Richard Spencer made this clear when he lauded Israel as the "the most important ethno-state, the one I turn to for guidance."[44]

White supremacy, with its inherently racist and violent nature, is based on the aspiration to cleanse the United States of its nonwhite population—that is, Muslims, Jews, Black, brown, and LGBTQ people—in the same way that Israel's project is to cleanse all those who stand in the way of its expansionist agenda.

The hideous policies of the current Israeli regime and its close alliance with the US establishment must be seen in the context of a long history of the occupation and colonization of Palestine. Indeed, it is a reminder that the Nakba is not a thing of the past. Its impact is felt by every single Palestinian, and its memory shields against the systematic attempt to whitewash the violence and bloodshed that characterized Israel's birth seventy years ago and sustains its apartheid regime today.

We should take pride in the record of the socialist movement and its principled opposition to antisemitism and all oppression. Today, those same principles require us to side wholly with Palestinians in their struggle against settler-colonial Israel. Next to the treacherous, counterrevolutionary record of Zionism we must counterpose the best traditions of the workers' movement of struggle and solidarity.



2

How Israel Became the Watchdog State

US Imperialism and the Middle East

Shireen Akram-Boshar

"There is another mighty aircraft carrier of our common civilization—it's called the State of Israel."

—Benjamin Netanyahu, July 3, 2017

Over the past half-century, the special relationship between the United States and Israel has played a major part in shaping the historical realities of the Middle East. During this time, the US has distinguished itself as Israel's most stalwart international diplomatic booster, economic sponsor, and military financier. The US supports no other country as unwaveringly as it does Israel. It is widely perceived that US support for Israel stems from the so-called Israel lobby within the US. While the influence of the Israel lobby is certainly powerful in Washington, it is not the "tail that wags the dog." Rather, the reality is that support for Israel is not only a bipartisan issue but

also in the interests of US capital as a whole, for maintaining its hold over the oil-rich, strategically important Middle East. The origins of this strategic relationship, its emergence from changing relationships in the Middle East—both movements on the ground and imperialist powers—is little understood. However, for those of us who wish to end US support for Israel, it is essential to understand the roots of the interest of the US ruling class in backing the apartheid state of Israel. This means being clear on how and why Israel became such a constant and reliable outpost for US imperialist interests.

The Middle East has long been a site of global imperialist rivalry and domination. The United States, however, only became a central player in the region in the second half of the twentieth century—at the same time that the state of Israel was establishing itself, against the will of the Palestinian people and indeed the peoples of the entire region. Israel's violent entrance on the scene—expelling more than 750,000 of the indigenous Palestinian population and setting itself up as a hostile, belligerent force to the surrounding states—required from its inception reliance on imperialist backers from outside the region, for economic and military aid as well as international legitimacy. Initially, the United States was not the primary imperial sponsor for the Zionist project and new state. In fact, before US imperialist intervention became more hegemonic in the region, Britain and France held the strings. The two great Western powers had carved up the region into spheres of control during the First World War with the covert Sykes-Picot Agreement, which explicitly betrayed the promises of independence they had given to Arab leaders.[1] Instead, France and Britain saw the imminent downfall of the four-hundred-year-old Ottoman Empire as an opportunity for them to occupy and exploit the region's resources, with an eye to newly discovered oil and the trade routes and access to the markets and colonies of Asia provided by the Suez Canal. Oil, in particular, was beginning to replace coal as the major fuel for industrial capitalism. France and Britain thus scratched borders into the map of the region, dividing it into states for their direct military occupations—today's Syria and Lebanon to the French; Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine to the British.[2]

Nearly thirty years later, the US emerged from the Second World War as the world's primary capitalist power, with the influence of Britain and

France waning worldwide and in the Middle East in particular. The United States turned its imperial ambitions to the Middle East for two strategic reasons: oil, and its rivalry with the Soviet Union. As capitalist production became internationalized—with US companies expanding and bringing new industries to nations across the globe—a vastly higher global demand for energy resulted, especially for oil and natural gas.[3] The discovery that the Gulf region of the Middle East "held the world's largest supply of cheap and easily accessible hydrocarbons," as described in 1945 in a US State Department memo, "brought with it profound geopolitical consequences, conferring on the region a potentially decisive role in determining the fortunes of capitalism at the global scale." This made Saudi Arabia in particular "a stupendous source of strategic power."[4] The US quickly built its first base in the region in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, that same year.

As the imperial might of Britain and France weakened, anticolonial movements reemerged throughout the Middle East and North Africa. A wave of revolutions spread through the region, demanding freedom from colonialism, national autonomy over natural and strategic resources, and the right to self-rule without imperialist coercion. But another rising imperialist power was also looking to extend its power in the region: the Soviet Union, which, in order to establish its own sphere of influence, declared its support for these resistance movements and offered to back the newly independent governments of the region. In response to the USSR's expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean, the US issued the Truman Doctrine in 1947, a declaration that the United States would intervene worldwide to "contain" the so-called global Soviet threat.[5] It proceeded in a decades-long race to secure allies in the region, assuming that any not taken up by the US would be snatched by the USSR. The US strove for domination of the Middle East primarily to establish control over its natural resources, as control of oil was strategic for domination of the world market, and secondarily to prevent the Soviet Union from doing so.

But anticolonial nationalism continued to rise, and the United States faced major challenges to its domination of the region. Newly independent states that had just thrown off the yoke of colonialism were not always eager to bow to the will of the world's newest imperial superpower. This was especially true when it came to national control over natural resources and key trade routes. In fact, the first major US intervention in the region

was to force out democratically elected prime minister Mohammed Mossadegh of Iran in 1953, after he threatened to remove foreign control of Iran's resources by nationalizing the country's previously British-owned oil industry. The CIA-backed coup that removed Mossadegh and restored the US-friendly Shah proved an immediate boon for US imperialism: it led to the transfer of 40 percent of Iranian oil from British to American hands and restored Iran as a key ally in the region for the next quarter century.[6]

Around the same time, in Egypt, nationalist army officers led by Gamal Abdel Nasser overthrew pro-Western King Farouk. Nasser soon maneuvered his way into Egypt's presidency. Nasser's rise to power worried Israel, Britain, and France, as he began to espouse nationalist and even socialist rhetoric to meet its popularity in the region at the time. Amid these new dynamics, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* published a proposal to the West:

> The West is none too happy about its relations with states in the Middle East. The feudal regimes there have to make such concessions to the nationalist movements … that they become more and more reluctant to supply Britain and the United States with their natural resources and military bases…. Therefore, strengthening Israel helps the Western powers maintain equilibrium and stability in the Middle East. Israel is to become the watchdog. There is no fear that Israel will undertake any aggressive policy towards the Arab states when this would explicitly contradict the wishes of the US and Britain. But if for any reason the Western powers should sometimes prefer to close their eyes, Israel could be relied upon to punish one or several neighboring states whose discourtesy to the West went beyond the bounds of permissible.[7]

Israel first appealed to France, which became the main weapons supplier to Israel in the 1950s until its withdrawal from Algeria in 1962. France and Israel both saw Egypt's Nasser as a threat, holding him responsible for encouraging resistance against colonial rule in Algeria and Palestine.[8] France, desperate to maintain its colonial grip on Algeria and insisting that Egypt's leadership posed an imminent danger, supplied Israel arms against Nasser while Israel provided France with intelligence. Israel was eager to play its part. As Shimon Peres, head of Israel's nuclear program and future Israeli prime minister, explained in 1955, "Every Frenchman killed in Algeria, like every Egyptian killed in the Gaza Strip, is a step toward strengthening the ties between France and Israel."[9] But Algeria's independence struck a serious blow to France's imperial reach in

the region, thus ending France’s motivation to act as Israel’s primary backer.

The US, on the other hand, was initially ambivalent about both Israel and Egypt’s Nasser. It hoped to win over the emerging nationalists as allies against the communists, who were also gaining strength across the region. To do so, the US had to play a balancing act, placating the nationalist movements by refraining from supporting outright the despised colonial powers of the day—Israel, Britain, and France. But Israel was determined to push the West to take action against Nasser. Israeli officials planned a series of bombings of US- and British-owned institutions in an attempt to frame Nasser. Egyptian intelligence uncovered the details of the plot in time and later executed two of the conspirators.[10] In response, Israel attacked the Gaza Strip, then under Egyptian control, killing thirty-seven Egyptian soldiers.

The US refused to provide Nasser with weapons that could be used against Israel, so Nasser turned to the USSR. In September 1955, he “made the first arms deal … that any Arab country had ever made with the Soviet Union.”[11] The US retaliated by withdrawing funds from Nasser’s planned Aswan High Dam. But Nasser continued to radicalize, and in July 1956, he nationalized the Suez Canal—a move wildly popular across the Middle East and North Africa, and a major affront to Britain and France. Yet it was Israel that initiated the attack on Egypt in October of that year, with Britain and France joining in November in the ensuing Suez Canal crisis.[12] The US, still playing a balancing act and hoping to retain some favor with the nationalists, “opposed th[is] attempt by Britain and France to reassert their influence” and forced the three powers to withdraw from Egypt.[13] The withdrawal ended nearly ninety years of British and French control over the Suez Canal and foreshadowed the power struggle between Egypt and Israel that would continue for two more decades.

Washington’s anxieties about waning Western influence and the increasingly radical pull of nationalism following the Suez Canal crisis led to the Eisenhower Doctrine. Issued in January 1957, the doctrine pledged military support to governments in the Middle East engaged in fighting communism. Nasser immediately rejected it. Still, the US relied on Nasser to quell the red tide spreading across the region. His jailing of members of

the Egyptian Communist Party—even though they supported his government—stands as one such example.[14] But the situation became even more uncertain for the West the following year: Egypt and Syria united to form the United Arab Republic; nationalists overthrew a pro-Western government in Iraq; and the regimes in Lebanon and Jordan faced nationalist revolts, which the US and Britain quickly intervened to crush. Nasser's nationalism, now spread throughout the region, prompted Saudi Arabia to force the US to evacuate its base in Dhahran in 1961.[15] In 1962, Nasser issued a national charter defining his regime as "socialist," and nationalists and communists revolted in Yemen. And in the mid-1960s, struggles in the Gulf region "led by Communist and nationalist leaders … fused agitation against the ongoing British presence in the Gulf with demands around worker and social issues."[16] Anti-imperialism was at its height, threatening to expel the Western powers from the region entirely. Socialist politics and ideas remained a vital part of this radicalizing moment.

However, although the nationalists posed challenges to Western imperialist interests in the region, Arab nationalist governments pursued a program of "Arab socialism" that, while using socialist rhetoric, promoted a top-down, state-run economy with no semblance of actual workers' control. Arab nationalist ideology itself downplayed the issue of class in the name of Arab unity. While nationalist governments like Nasser's issued some welfare policies and enacted land redistribution to allow certain temporary gains for their radicalizing working classes, they ruled using increasingly authoritarian methods that enforced one-party rule and narrowed the possibilities for democratic organizing. Their policies enabled a gradual capitulation to capitalist and eventually neoliberal policies, sidelining and even crushing communist and Marxist parties. In December 1958, Nasser responded to Communist Party criticisms of his regime by arresting hundreds of communist activists. He continued to arrest thousands of left-wing opponents in the next year, relegating the communist parties to activity within Egypt's prisons and leading to their dissolution in the 1960s.[17] In fact, it did not take long for nationalists to "brutally [crush] the Communists in Syria beginning in 1958–59 and in Iraq from 1959 to 1963," to Washington's relief. For the US, the relief "was all the greater because

the Communist parties in both Syria and Iraq had grown to the point that they could aim at seizing power."[18]

In spite of these victories in crushing the communists, the region's nationalists could no longer be seen as a reliable ally for the US and its imperialist aims. Nasser's rhetoric continued to inspire anti-imperialist revolt, nationalization and closure of western military bases, and notions of Arab unity that conflicted with US domination in the region. After the Eisenhower Doctrine, "the ambiguity in Washington's attitude toward Arab nationalism, seen as a hostile force and yet at the same time as at least a potential ally against the Communists, faded away. As the Communists were crushed and the nationalists steadily radicalized, Washington's ambivalence gave way to pure and simple antagonism."[19] It was at this juncture that the US focused its attention on Israel.

The shift in focus came with money. In 1959, the US began providing military aid to Israel, but at just $400,000 a year.[20] It was in the 1960s that US President Kennedy made "the first tangible US commitment to Israel's military security."[21] Kennedy was the first president to speak of the "special relationship" between the US and Israel, akin to the "US relationship with the British," telling Israeli foreign minister Golda Meir in 1962, "I think it is quite clear that in case of an invasion the United States would come to the support of Israel."[22] By 1965, US military aid to Israel had reached $12.9 million annually. But the real turning point came around the 1967 War. In 1966, the US ramped up its military support to Israel, providing it with $90 million in military aid in the year prior to its attack on Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. The US hoped that Israel would defeat Nasser and Syria's Ba'ath regime, and consequently embarrass the Soviet Union and empower Israel to be the watchdog state it had promised to be fifteen years prior.[23] As a spokesperson for the Israeli foreign office explained in 1966, "The United States has come to the conclusion that it can no longer respond to every incident around the world, that it must rely on a local power, the deterrent of a friendly power as a first line to stave off America's direct involvement. Israel feels it fits this definition."[24]

The June 1967 war proved to the US that Israel could rein in the Arab states when needed and that supporting Israel achieved more than the US

could through its own military prowess in the region. In a swift victory, Israel captured and occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt—redrawing the map as it expanded. Israel built its first military settlements on newly occupied land, and expelled an estimated three hundred thousand Palestinians, some of them for a second time.[25] Israel's massive defeat of the Arab armies dealt a blow to the nationalist regimes, and to Arab nationalism as a political project, that surpassed even the US's expectations. The 1967 War thus cemented the US-Israel strategic alliance. As Naseer Aruri explains, "The Israeli victory in 1967 spared the US the trouble of direct intervention to contain Nasserism. Presidents from Lyndon Johnson to Ronald Reagan acknowledged with gratitude Israel's sub-imperial role[:] 'If there were no Israel with that force, we'd have to supply that with our own, so this isn't just altruism on our part,' said Reagan," who described Israel as a "strategic asset."[26]

Israel's defeat of the Arab regime armies sparked a temporary escalation in Palestinian armed struggle and further radicalization across the region. But by 1970, Arab nationalism was all but crushed. Not long after Anwar Sadat replaced Nasser in Egypt, he proceeded to make peace with Israel and usher in neoliberal capitalist policies, reversing any gains that had come into effect under his predecessor. In addition to Israel and Egypt, the US had also secured Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran as allies throughout the 1970s, leaving it with strong pillars of regional influence throughout the decade. Israel, alongside the region's other regimes, continued to crush any upsurges in Palestinian struggle that emerged in the next decade, as well as their nationalist and leftist counterparts throughout the Middle East.

US dependence on Israel as its "strategic asset" in the region became clear soon thereafter. In 1970, when the Palestine Liberation Organization—at the time grouping together Fateh, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, with other political factions, and backed by widespread Palestinian support and sections of Jordanian society[27]—was on the verge of overthrowing Jordan's King Hussein, the US called on Israel to step in for the sake of the regime.[28] The US and King Hussein agreed on the dire need to contain the Palestinian national movement, which was on the verge of becoming a revolution, but the US was in no position to intervene.[29]

Fearing that Syria and the Soviet Union would enter the conflict on the side of the Palestinian revolutionaries, US secretary of state Kissinger asked Israel to prepare to intercede.[30] Israel agreed, but only with the assurance that the US would act on Israel's behalf if needed, and that the US would accelerate its supply of arms to Israel.[31]

Though Syrian tanks did cross into Jordan, a split in the Syrian regime meant a quick exit and abandonment and betrayal of the Palestinian movement.[32] The feared Syrian–Soviet intervention never took place. The Jordanian regime crushed the Palestinian forces and expelled them from the country, further weakening the Palestinian resistance movement. But Israel was still rewarded for its willingness to intervene on behalf of the US. Yitzhak Rabin, then serving as Israel's ambassador to the US, recounted how Kissinger called him a few days later with a message from President Nixon: "The president will never forget Israel's role in preventing the deterioration in Jordan and in blocking the attempt to overturn the regime there. […] These events will be taken into account in all future developments."[33] US military aid to Israel multiplied tenfold immediately following the crisis.[34]

Throughout the next decade, Israel, with US backing, intervened to support reactionary, right-wing regimes in crushing the Palestinian movement throughout the region and showed its might against Soviet-backed armies. Israel beat back the Arab regimes' armies again in 1973, thanks to the largest US airlift of arms in history, proving that it could defeat Soviet-backed states. Israel invaded Lebanon in 1978 and then in 1982, again with the aim of crushing the PLO and in support of fascist forces bent on quashing the country's left. Each time Israel succeeded in carrying out the US's dirty work in the region, it witnessed massive increases in US military aid.

But Israel's new role as US watchdog was not just regional. In fact, in the ensuing decades, Israel carried out this role globally: providing arms to dictators and regimes worldwide that the US could not openly support and training military and police forces in repressing uprisings and controlling migration. After 1967, Israel began to establish its own full-scale arms industry. Throughout the 1970s and '80s, Israel covertly and overtly supported Latin American dictatorships, apartheid South Africa, and the

Iranian shah with arms and paramilitary training. At times, it served as a direct conduit for US arms, providing weapons to regimes notorious for their brutality that the US could not support directly. Israel supplied the vast majority of arms imported by the right-wing military government of El Salvador and its paramilitary death squads and gave millions to the Salvadoran regime.[35] Israel acted as major arms supplier to Guatemala's police force, even as it was "condemned by Amnesty International and other human rights groups for its part in official death squads responsible for the murders of thousands"[36] and to the Somoza regime of Nicaragua, supplying more than 90 percent of its arms as the regime killed tens of thousands. Somoza bombed the slums of Nicaragua "mainly with Israeli-made Arava and West Wind planes."[37] This pattern was widespread, as Israel also supplied arms to dictatorial regimes in Ecuador, Chile, Paraguay, and Argentina.[38] All these regimes killed and disappeared thousands in their "dirty wars."

The US also used Israel to supply and train repressive regimes across Africa, including Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia), Malawi, and apartheid South Africa.[39] In South Africa—where the racism of the state had isolated it from most of the world's countries—the US funneled helicopters through Israel to circumvent the embargo. Israel did the same with South African products, selling them globally. This was in addition to extensive economic and military collaboration between the two states.[40] This same pattern was repeated in Asia, with Israel supplying the regimes of Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, and Taiwan. Israel even sold arms to Iran, including during the hostage crisis, with Ronald Reagan's covert consent. In short, Israel has supported regimes around the world bent on crushing democratic movements that might pose a challenge to an oppressive status quo—one that both the US and Israel rely on to maintain their global dominance.

Israel was soon elevated to the US's primary ally. After the fall of the shah of Iran in the revolution of 1979, Reagan "dismissed the Arab regimes in the Gulf as 'weak and vulnerable,' asserting that Israel was 'perhaps the only strategic asset in the area that the United States can really rely on.'"[41] Under Reagan, Israel and the US devised agreements of strategic cooperation that institutionalized Israel's role as regional watchdog through

mutual military assistance, exchange of intelligence, and shared commitment to combating so-called threats posed by the Soviet Union or other forces in the region.[42]

But the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, in 1991, brought about a shift in global imperialist dynamics, as the US looked to reshape relationships in the Middle East. The US, now the world's sole imperial superpower, immediately took advantage of this shift to invade Iraq in 1991, with an eye to a policy of dual containment of Iraq and Iran. At the same time, the US also sought to use its new superpower status to become the primary mediating power for Israel, pushing forward a "peace process" that entailed a complete subjugation of the Palestinian population. As Aruri explains, "With the destruction of Iraq and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, a Palestinian–Israeli settlement based on US designs suddenly became possible and desirable."[43] The lack of a peace process had proved to be a serious obstacle to both the US and Israel, as regional stability—on their terms—was desirable for hegemony. A peace process prioritizing economic cooperation and liberalization, while quashing possibilities for Palestinian resistance, would lead to normalized relationships with regimes across the region and allow the US to penetrate those markets it had previously been unable to access. This took the form of the 1993 Oslo Accords. Despite the initial optimism surrounding the peace process, Oslo accelerated the construction of new settlements in the West Bank and the division of the remaining Palestinian territories into fragmented Bantustans.

The Oslo Accords turned the Palestinian leadership itself into a pawn of the Israeli state, subcontracted with the task of repressing Palestinian resistance, and narrowed the possibilities for Palestinian democratic organizing or even community building, as basic movement from one Palestinian town to another became restricted if not impossible. This, of course, was the desired trajectory for Israel, which continued to reap the benefits of the new Middle East order. The 1990s also brought about shared US-Israeli military ventures, commitments to fighting so-called Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism, and the promotion of Israel to partner, rather than subordinate.[44]

The US response to 9/11 also foreshadowed major structural changes in the Middle East, while continuing to bring the US and Israel closer together.

George W. Bush's War on Terror fused US right-wing ideology with that of Israel, cementing the shared goals and outlooks of the two countries as partners in fighting "Islamic terrorism." This war signaled a green light for the collective punishment of millions of Arabs, Muslims, and refugees in the region and worldwide, and emboldened Israel to ramp up its own repression of Palestinians. As the US invaded Afghanistan and then, yet again, Iraq, Israel expanded its war on Palestinians, invading Palestinian refugee camps and cities in 2002, all the while becoming recognized as a worldwide expert in "antiterrorism" and "security."[45] To further entrench its apartheid system, and in the name of "counterterrorism," Israel built a 470-mile wall through the occupied West Bank. Reminiscent of the Berlin Wall, the Apartheid Wall further curtails any freedom of movement for Palestinians, dividing West Bank towns from each other and displacing more Palestinians in the process.[46] Authoritarian states worldwide look to these practices as a model. Israel began to provide trainings for police forces globally to control their restive populations, secure borders, and police migrants. Hundreds of federal, state, local, and even campus police forces now train with the Israeli military. US police, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Border Patrol, and the Transportation Security Agency (TSA) train with Israel's border agents, police, and soldiers—all under the label of "counterterrorism."[47] In these trainings, often conducted in Israel, police are taught tactics for fighting "urban warfare," strategies to racially profile and repress people of color, and the use of new technologies—such as "skunk water," a foul-smelling crowd-control liquid—for suppressing dissent and protest. In 2014 and 2017, Israel's largest private military company, Elbit Systems—founded in 1967 and considered one of the world's top "security and defense" companies—was awarded contracts by the US Department of Homeland Security to militarize the US–Mexico border. The Israeli state serves as the research, development, and training division of the US state and other authoritarian regimes worldwide.

But regional and global dynamics have not remained static. The 2008 financial crisis drastically affected the balance of powers worldwide as well as the livelihoods of millions of people. The US, no longer the world's sole superpower since its overreach in Iraq in 2003, faces an ascendant superpower in China, along with the rise of regional capitalist powers that

have escalated rivalries across the globe and in the Middle East in particular.

In 2011, a wave of democratic revolutions, sparked in large part by the immiseration of decades of neoliberalism, swept the Middle East and North Africa. Echoing the revolts of fifty years prior, they threatened to overthrow US puppet states throughout the region. For two solid years, the progressive uprisings looked as if they might change the dynamic in the region, while also inspiring uprisings and movements across the globe. Solidarity with Palestine and decades of frustration with the US and Israel's meddling in the region, along with the collusion of the Arab regimes, remained an underlying factor unifying the popular revolts. But the region's regimes soon regrouped, shared lessons of repression, and returned with a vengeance to carry out nearly a decade of counterrevolutionary terror. Becoming more emboldened in their counterrevolutionary violence and authoritarianism, the regimes have come into their own as regional powers, intervening in unprecedented ways. Saudi Arabia has engineered sectarianism throughout the region in response to the 2011 revolutions, intervened across its borders to crush Bahrain's 2011 uprising, and began a bombing campaign that has brought the people of Yemen to what is possibly the worst humanitarian crisis of the twenty-first century. Iran emerged as the primary benefactor from the invasion of Iraq and extended its influence over that country; after 2011 it propped up Syria's brutal dictatorship and escalated its rivalry with Saudi Arabia. Each of the region's states works with the others in various ways, using unprecedented levels of violence to ensure the crushing of the democratic movements that emerged in 2011. Israel and the US, always the enemies of progressive movements that might challenge their grip on power or their access to oil, supported the counterrevolutions, deepening their ties to Saudi Arabia and Sisi's Egypt. While the current conditions of the Middle East—in which authoritarian states collaborate more closely than ever to stave off mass dissent—are untenable, Israel remains a reliable constant, unlikely to be swayed in its role by regional upheaval. With the rise of global rivals like China, which also aims to extend its influence in the region, the US state is likely to rely even more heavily upon allies like Israel.[48] The counterrevolutionary crackdown, carried out in the name of antiterrorism, gives further cover for Israel and the US to use greater levels of violence against Palestinians and across the Middle East.

The United States' backing of Israel for the past half-century has not been, as some have argued, due to the whims of certain US presidents or the influence of the Zionist lobby. Though the Israel lobby, including institutions like American Israel Public Affairs Committee, does impact US politics—particularly in the encouragement of anti-BDS legislation and the scapegoating of Arab and Muslim students and activists—it is by no means the driving force behind bipartisan support for Israel. Both Republicans and Democrats have unconditionally supported Israel; Obama vastly increased funding for Israel even as it carried out three major assaults on Gaza under his watch. US support for Israel is in service of the interests of the US ruling class, which needs an unconditional ally to retain its imperialist power in the Middle East and worldwide.

Any serious challenge to Israel's apartheid regime, then, must also challenge US imperialism and its backing of the Israeli state. So too must it challenge regional capitalist powers and the system of imperialism that, as a whole, prevents democratic movements from taking shape wherever they might emerge. While the US may be in relative decline as a global superpower, it shows no sign of loosening its grip on the Middle East or retreating from its strategic alliance with Israel. Both Democrats and Republicans have insisted on the US need to continue to intervene in the Middle East, in support of Israel, against the threat of Iran, and against Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the latest phase of the War on Terror—which, in practice, means continued bombings and collective punishment against entire populations, as seen in the flattening of Iraq's Mosul and Syria's Raqqa. Israel, too, remains a violent force opposed to democratic and popular change in the Middle East and worldwide. Today, it backs Myanmar's ethnic cleansing of its Rohingya population, encourages Islamophobic policing and repression, and remains the best representation of the subjugation experienced by millions across the Middle East and North Africa, who have struggled against colonialism, imperialism, and collaborative regimes for more than a century. A fundamental challenge to the US-Israel strategic relationship will thus necessarily come with a transformation of global relationships of domination, an end to the role of the US as an imperialist power, and an end to imperialist domination and rivalry over the Middle East.



3

The National Liberation Struggle

A Socialist Analysis

Mostafa Omar

Editors' Note: The following chapter is an updated reprint of the original written in 2002.[1] *This piece provides insights into the trajectory of Palestinian resistance and an analysis of the different currents within the national liberation movement. It was written amid the turbulence of the Second Intifada, which signaled a deep discontent with the so-called Oslo peace process. The United States was publicly preparing for its illegal invasion of Iraq. Triggered by the events of 9/11, the (still) ongoing War on Terror was reshaping American empire. At the time of writing, Yasser Arafat was still alive and Fateh was still dominant in the movement. The Arab Spring had yet to unsettle and unseat dictators and despots. Despite the many historical moments and events that have unfolded since its original publication, this chapter provides important context for the ongoing revolts of the Arab Spring across the region, while making a strong*

case for why the struggle for Palestine inspires and rallies movements regionally.

Since the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993, endless rounds of negotiations between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel have failed to secure an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, a Palestinian state, or the right of return for five million Palestinian refugees. Moreover, living conditions for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories have actually deteriorated. Poverty and unemployment have skyrocketed. And Israel has expanded its settlements. As Palestinian professor Edward Said described the situation:

> In the Palestinian case, the tragedy of a dispossessed and militarily occupied people is compounded by a leadership that made a "peace" deal with its more powerful enemy, a deal that serves Israel's strategic purposes by keeping Palestinians, whose land has been practically lost to Zionist conquest, in a state of depression and servitude…. The fact is that by his behavior Mr. Arafat[2] no longer represents the majority of Palestinians, and now survives without dignity by virtue of US, Israeli, and Arab support.[3]

In September 2000, as a result of deteriorating living conditions since Oslo and increasing frustration with the PLO's political impotence, the Palestinians began their second mass uprising in fifteen years, the al-Aqsa Intifada.[4] Since then, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have taken to the streets of the West Bank and Gaza to confront the Israeli army and settlers directly. Despite brutal repression by Israel and repeated attempts by Arafat to rein in Palestinian anger, the Palestinians have shown, once again, tremendous courage and willingness to make huge sacrifices to win their freedom.

Unfortunately, the heroic struggles of the al-Aqsa Intifada are insufficient to stop Israel. The Palestinians simultaneously face a number of difficult obstacles: Israel's brutal repression, unconditional US political and military support for Israel, betrayals and repression by the PLO itself, and maneuvers by pro-US Arab regimes to end the intifada before other Arab workers begin to emulate it.

Although formidable, these obstacles are not insurmountable. But in order for the Palestinians to overcome them, a mass movement needs to be built across the Arab world to challenge both US imperialism and the Arab

regimes backed by it. Such a movement could provide the necessary political and economic support for the Palestinians to challenge Israel.

The success of any mass movement in challenging the US and the Arab regimes and supporting the Palestinians against Israel is linked to the question of building a socialist alternative in the Arab world. The case for this alternative starts from the realization that Arab workers, who produce all the oil and wealth in the area, have to fight for real, democratic control over society in order to rid themselves of the miserable conditions imposed by the ruling Arab regimes and the United States.

But a socialist alternative in the Arab world would have to learn from the mistakes of an older generation of radicals that looked to Stalinist Russia and certain "progressive" Arab regimes, such as Syria and Iraq, as models for social change.[5] This means rejecting the compromises with Zionism of the PLO; looking to the struggles of ordinary people in Palestine against Israel; recognizing that solidarity with the Arab working classes, not negotiations, is the way to stop Israel; and fighting for a secular and democratic Palestine based on equality between Arabs and Jews.

Building a socialist alternative in the Arab world, especially in Palestine, requires clarity on a number of key political questions. Why did the PLO surrender to Israel and Washington? Whose class interests does the PLO represent? Why did many Palestinians turn to Hamas? What happened to the Palestinian left, the Popular and the Democratic Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine? Why does the left tail Arafat's policy? Is it really necessary (or realistic) to look to the struggles of Arab workers as the way to liberate Palestine?

These questions cannot be properly answered without a reexamination of the history of the Palestinian national liberation movement, especially of the rise and fall of the PLO and the Palestinian left. Such a reexamination is necessary to achieve theoretical clarity for those of us who want to continue to resist both Israel and US imperialism. This essay hopes to make a small contribution toward that goal.

The pre-1948 nationalist movement

In the three decades that preceded the 1948 Nakba ("catastrophe"), the Palestinians carried out a brave struggle to resist the Zionist project of

building a Jewish state that would serve as an outpost for Western imperialism in the Middle East. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Palestinians challenged Britain's colonial mandate over Palestine and its policy of facilitating Jewish immigration and settlement. In 1929, Palestinians organized demonstrations and protests against Jewish settlements and businesses, in what became known as the Buraq Rebellion. The British army viciously suppressed these protests.[6]

The intensification of Jewish immigration, triggered by the rise of fascism in Europe during the first half of the 1930s, placed more pressure on Palestinians. The Palestinians resumed the fight against British colonialism and Zionism, turning to armed struggle as a means of resistance. Led by the Muslim Brotherhood's Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam,[7] a network of militias drawn primarily from peasants and urban intellectuals attacked British and Zionist interests all over Palestine. Mandate police killed al-Qassam in a gun battle in 1935, but the armed struggle continued.

In 1936, a mass social struggle joined with the armed struggle. In April, following weeks of clashes between Palestinian protesters and Jewish settlers, Arab dockworkers at the port of Jaffa struck to protest British support for Jewish immigration. Under mass pressure, the Palestinian elite, under the leadership of Jerusalem's mufti, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, was forced to call a general strike. Within days, the strike spread to other major Palestinian ports, cities, and villages. All sections of Palestinian Arab society, including workers, peasants, small businesses, and even sections of large business, joined the strike. The strike demanded an end to Jewish immigration, a ban on the sale of land to settlers, and the replacement of the British Mandate by a government drawn from the majority population. Palestinians organized a mass civil disobedience campaign and stopped paying taxes to British authorities. Meanwhile, al-Qassam militias attacked British and Zionist interests all over the country.[8]

The general strike lasted for six months, before the British managed to end it with brutal repression. Armed struggle continued for two more years. Eventually, the British army and Zionist militias managed to crush the armed struggle. In total, this mass rebellion (which became known as the 1936 Great Arab Revolt) lasted for three years.

Despite the Palestinians' heroic struggles and sacrifices, the 1936 revolt failed. This was attributable to two main factors. First, the poorly armed Palestinian militias were no match for the overwhelming military superiority of the combined British and Zionist forces. Moreover, Zionist displacement of Palestinian workers in strategic workplaces throughout Palestine helped the British to "block Arab nationalist efforts to spread the general strike and fully paralyze the country's economy."[9] Second, fearing a total loss of control over the Palestinian masses, the Palestinian elite, backed by reactionary Arab regimes close to Britain, weakened the rebellion through its compromises with Britain and its constant maneuvers to end the revolt.

Indeed, the conservative role the Palestinian elite played during the 1920s and 1930s presented many obstacles to the development of a successful struggle against Zionism. This elite, composed of big landowners and merchants, generally opposed British colonialism and the establishment of a Jewish state. However, two factors mitigated this elite's opposition to colonialism. On one hand, different wealthy Palestinian families competed for support from British authorities to edge out their rivals. On the other hand, economic ties between the Palestinian elite as a whole and the other pro-British Arab ruling classes, such as those in Egypt and Jordan, prompted the Palestinian elite to avoid confrontation with Britain. This explains, for example, why some members of the elite called for an end to attacks on Zionist interests during the Buraq Rebellion in 1929, or argued for a disastrous policy of strengthening relations with Britain to win the latter away from supporting Zionism. Some Palestinian notables even went so far as to argue that Britain should maintain its mandate over Palestine as a last line of defense against Zionism![10]

Indeed, some wealthy families, such as the al-Nashashibis and al-Husseinis, organized different nationalist parties. However, these families aimed to use the nationalist struggle as a way to advance their own narrow commercial and political interests. Their animosity toward each other and their fear of the masses of Palestinian peasants and workers always outweighed their opposition to British colonialism and Zionism.[11] In other words, the Palestinian elite was more interested in maintaining its wealth and its ties with Arab regimes than it was in leading a fight against British colonialism and Zionism.

In contrast, throughout the same period, Palestinian workers and peasants made enormous sacrifices in the nationalist struggle. In the cities, workers organized numerous strikes and street protests. In the countryside, peasants fought bravely despite years of British terror.

The heroism of these workers and peasants was insufficient to overcome the conservative influence of the Palestinian elite in the nationalist struggle. In pre-1948 Palestine, the working class was still a tiny minority of the population, without much union or political organization. The peasants, on the other hand, lacked the social cohesion necessary to play an effective political role. These weaknesses meant that the Palestinian masses were ill prepared to take on the giant task of successfully challenging the British army and a well-funded and well-armed Zionist settler movement.

The Palestine Communist Party: A false start

Divided between rival factions in the Palestinian elite, the nationalist movement remained fragmented and weak. Under these circumstances, there was a clear need for a progressive left alternative. Unfortunately, the Palestine Communist Party (PCP), the only socialist organization in Palestine prior to 1948, suffered from serious political weaknesses that prevented it from challenging the leadership and control of the conservative Palestinian elite.

Founded in 1924 with help from the Communist International (Comintern), the PCP aimed to unite Arab and Jewish workers in a struggle to build a socialist Palestine.[12] However, the PCP, like other communist parties around the world, ceased to be a revolutionary organization by the early 1930s, following Stalin's ascendancy to power in Russia. Thus, the PCP formulated its policies based on the needs of Russian foreign policy in the Middle East, not on those of workers' struggles against colonialism. This meant that the PCP followed orders from Moscow—even those that led to its isolation from the Arab masses.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, party membership remained almost wholly Jewish, owing to its origin in a split from the left-Zionist Socialist Workers Party. The PCP did not produce its first Arabic publication until 1929. The Buraq Rebellion that year caught the party unprepared. Party publications and spokespeople simultaneously initially characterized the

rebellion as an anti-imperialist uprising and an anti-Jewish pogrom. In 1935, it adopted a policy of “revolution in stages,” calling for its members in oppressed countries to unite with the “progressive bourgeoisie” in an anti-imperialist “people’s front.” In Palestine, this policy translated into an uncritical tailing of the traditional Arab leadership.

In 1943, the PCP split on national lines. Jewish members, accusing the party leadership of “ultranationalist” politics, reorganized the PCP as a party accepting the Zionist idea that the Yishuv, the Jewish community of Palestine, constituted a national group entitled to self-determination. The PCP’s decision to abandon the goal of fighting for a united, socialist Palestine drove most of the Arab cadre to quit the party. Later that year, some of these cadres, such as Bulus Farah, regrouped in the National Liberation League (NLL).

A final blow to genuine socialist politics in Palestine came when the USSR decided to back the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine in 1947. Until then, the PCP had opposed partition, despite its softness on Zionism. When the Soviet Union announced its support for the formation of Israel, a state it hoped to turn into a Soviet ally in the region against the US and Britain, the PCP followed suit. Jewish PCP members joined the Haganah to fight Arab resistance to the formation of the state of Israel in 1948. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union’s support for partition threw the NLL into disarray, with some leaders supporting partition and others opposing it.

In the end, the NLL was too small and politically confused to play any significant role in preventing the catastrophic destruction of Palestinian Arab society that ensued.[13]

Rebirth of a national liberation movement

The 1948 Nakba set back the Palestinian nationalist movement for years. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the destruction of Palestinian Arab society and the transformation of 70 percent of the population into refugees living under authoritarian Arab regimes made it very difficult to organize resistance.

But by the mid-1950s, as Palestinians became embittered with the unwillingness of the Arab regimes to solve the refugee problem or to challenge Israel, the Palestinian nationalist movement started to revive. A

group of Palestinian intellectuals and professionals who lived and studied in Arab countries—among them Yasser Arafat—formed the Palestinian liberation movement Fateh in 1958. Drawing on the experience of the Algerian war of independence against France, Fateh advocated "armed struggle" (guerrilla warfare) to liberate Palestine. Fateh grew in size and popularity.

In the aftermath of Israel's victory over Egypt, under president Gamal Abdel Nasser, and other Arab regimes in the June 1967 war, Fateh's armed struggle gave millions of people across the Arab world hope in the possibility of fighting back. Fateh's 1968 Battle of Karameh, where underequipped Palestinian guerrillas held off the Israel Defense Forces near the Jordanian town of Karameh, inspired thousands of Palestinians and others from all over the world to join its ranks.

In 1969, Fateh succeeded in taking over the PLO, an organization that Arab governments had founded in 1964. As originally conceived, the PLO allowed the Arab governments—most notably, Nasser's Egypt—to pay lip service to the Palestinian struggle, while keeping control over its activities. Under its chair, Ahmed Shukeiri, a Palestinian lawyer, the PLO was a weak and undynamic organization. By 1969, Fateh's prestige put it in a position to take the PLO's reins as Nasser pushed Shukeiri aside. Fateh turned the PLO into a mass organization that included all the newly formed left-wing and revolutionary organizations.[14]

The Palestine National Charter, revised in 1968, showed the influence of the guerrillas on the Palestinian movement. The PLO continued to identify Palestine as the "indivisible territorial unit" within the borders of the pre-Israel British Mandate. Moreover, it asserted, "armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine. Thus it is the overall strategy, not merely a tactical phase…. Commando action constitutes the nucleus of the Palestinian popular liberation war." In addition, the charter stated that Palestinians "reject all solutions which are substitutes for the total liberation of Palestine."[15] The radical language reflected the heady days of early guerrilla success.

Fateh's ideology appealed to Palestinians who wanted action, not diplomatic wrangling with Arab regime sponsors. But Fateh didn't want to answer the question: "Whose Palestine?" Fateh regarded itself as a representative of all social classes in Palestinian society. It argued that any

class differences among Palestinians must be put aside in order to wage a successful struggle. Fateh's nationalist ideology ignored the irreconcilability of class antagonisms among Palestinians.

The 1948 catastrophe affected wealthy and poor Palestinians in different ways. While a large number of wealthy Palestinians were able to transfer their assets to neighboring Arab countries in the months leading up to the catastrophe, the vast majority of Palestinian peasants and workers ended up in UN refugee camps. So, while wealthy Palestinians were able to regroup and eventually play a central economic role in Arab countries, the majority of refugees lacked any social, economic, or political rights.

Fateh's nationalist ideology suited the interests of the Palestinian bourgeoisie. This group, on one hand, needed a movement such as Fateh to achieve the goal of building its own state. But, on the other hand, the Palestinian bourgeoisie needed to ensure that poor refugees would not rebel against its oppressive Arab allies. Fateh promised to fulfill both of those needs: mobilizing the Palestinian refugees to fight Israel while avoiding confrontation with Arab governments.

Fateh adopted a "principle of nonintervention" in the internal affairs of Arab countries. The PLO under Fateh received billions in aid from Arab regimes, including the Gulf monarchies. In exchange, the PLO refused to take stands on political and social questions affecting the Palestinians and other populations of its Arab sponsors. In the oil-rich Gulf monarchies, Palestinian workers toiled for fifty years to build the economies of these states while they were denied basic economic and human rights. Still, Fateh failed to support the struggles of Palestinian oil workers in the 1950s against the giant American oil company ARAMCO.[16] It also failed to challenge the policies of the Arab regimes, such as Egypt and Jordan, that jailed and tortured Palestinian activists, not to mention thousands of other Arab trade unionists and radicals. The nonintervention principle meant that Fateh compromised, time and again, with regimes that oppressed Palestinian refugees and lacked any interest in challenging either Israel or Western influence in the area.

Despite its initial successes, the PLO paid for the "principle of nonintervention" with a number of serious political and military setbacks. The organization's crushing defeat in Jordan during the events of September 1970 was the most prominent of these. In the late 1960s, the PLO had

established itself as the main political and military force in Jordan, virtually eclipsing the hated regime of King Hussein. It had the political support of Palestinian refugees, who made up 70 percent of Jordan's population. Time and again, however, Arafat turned down appeals from Palestinian activists, and even some Jordanian army officers, to depose the king and replace his regime with a democratic one. A democratic Jordan, many radicals believed, would provide a model for other Arab people to emulate. It could also unleash the potential of mass struggle that would be needed to fight a strong military regime such as Israel.

But the PLO's hesitations proved costly. In September 1970, King Hussein used the crisis precipitated by Palestinian leftists' airline hijackings as a pretext to launch an all-out military attack on the PLO. Arafat once again refused to enter into an all-out confrontation with the king's regime. A confrontation with the king, from Arafat's point of view, would have caused massive political instability in the region. It could have also endangered the PLO's support among other Arab dictators. The PLO's passive resistance allowed the king's army to massacre hundreds of Palestinian activists while subjecting the refugee population to a reign of terror. Finally, Arafat agreed to transfer PLO institutions and militias from Jordan to Lebanon.[17]

The PLO was never able to recover from its defeat in Jordan. If the Arab defeat in the 1967 War showed the impotence of the Arab regimes against Israel, "Black September" convinced the PLO leader Salah Khalaf that

> it was only too evident that the Palestinian revolution could not count on any Arab state to provide a secure sanctuary or an operational base against Israel. In order to forge ahead toward the democratic, inter-sectarian society that was our ideal, we had to have our own state, even on a square inch of Palestine.[18]

Khalaf's statement put a radical-sounding gloss on an emerging shift in the PLO's goals. In the immediate aftermath of the 1973 Arab–Israeli War, the US launched the "peace process" of negotiations between Arab states and Israel. The US aimed to win Arab recognition of Israel in exchange for Israel's return of Arab land it occupied in 1967 and 1973. Arab regimes, yearning to establish closer relations with the US, pressured the PLO to abandon its radical goals. And PLO leaders increasingly looked to

international diplomacy to win the "mini-state" they desired. Phil Marshall spells out the political impact of Fateh's decision:

> Fateh accepted, dropping its principal aim—the liberation of the whole of Palestine—in favor of the prospect of the mini-state, which was to be pressed on Israel by the US. Although the Fateh leadership had long debated the character of the Palestinian "entity" for which it struggled—the extent of its territory, whether it should co-exist with Israel, and whether it should give citizenship to Israeli Jews—it had never publicly conceded the Zionist movement's right to control any area of Palestine.[19]

Indeed, in 1974, Arafat officially called for a two-state solution and accepted UN resolutions that partitioned Palestine. In a famous speech to the UN General Assembly, Arafat offered Israel a "historic compromise," while waving a gun with one hand and an olive branch with the other. This compromise effectively amounted to recognition of the state of Israel and, in some ways, became a prelude to Oslo.

The PLO's charter, revised in 1974, reflected the shift away from armed struggle to the mini-state solution:

> The PLO will struggle by every means, the foremost of which is armed struggle, to liberate Palestinian land and to establish the people's national, independent and fighting sovereignty on every part of Palestinian land to be liberated. This requires the creation of further changes in the balance of power in favor of our people and their struggle.

The PLO completed its evolution to "peaceful coexistence" with Israel at its nineteenth Palestinian National Council (PNC) meeting, in 1988, where Arafat issued a Palestinian "Declaration of Independence." Meeting as the grassroots-led Intifada was tying down thousands of Israeli troops in the Occupied Territories, the PNC took the initiative to advance its diplomatic agenda for the mini-state. In unambiguous language, Arafat and the PNC laid out a number of historic concessions to Israel.

The PNC recognized Israel. It endorsed the 1947 UN resolution that partitioned Palestine. It proposed that the independent Palestinian state be located in the West Bank and Gaza—only 23 percent of pre-1947 Palestine. It renounced "terrorism" (i.e., the armed struggle) and endorsed diplomacy as the means to achieve the mini-state. These 1988 Palestinian concessions paved the road to Oslo.[20]

The Palestinian left: An alternative to Fateh?

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a new Palestinian left could have challenged Fateh's leadership of the PLO. Two main organizations, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), criticized Fateh's "principle of nonintervention" and attempted, briefly, to build a left-wing current in the national liberation movement.

Radical Arab nationalist intellectuals, led by George Habash, founded the PFLP immediately after the June 1967 War. The inability of self-proclaimed "socialist" Arab regimes, such as Nasser's Egypt, to live up to their promises of fighting Israel and US imperialism, pushed these activists to search for more radical means to liberate Palestine. Inspired by the successes of the Cuban Revolution and other anti-imperialist struggles in Algeria and Vietnam, and influenced by a combination of Maoist and Stalinist ideas, the PFLP declared itself to be a "Marxist-Leninist" organization. It viewed the Palestinian cause as one part of a worldwide struggle against imperialism. It believed that the plight of the Palestinians was closely connected to the oppression of the Arab masses by Arab dictatorships and imperialism. Therefore, it argued that the liberation of the Palestinian people was tied into the struggle for a socialist society in the entire Middle East.[21]

The PFLP rejected the notion that any of the nationalist Arab regimes was actually "socialist." These "petit bourgeois"[22] regimes, the PFLP argued, were unable and unwilling to challenge Israel or US imperialism because of their dependence on the international capitalist economy. A deep class antagonism between workers and peasants, on one hand, and the Arab bourgeoisie, on the other, characterized the Arab regimes. Thus, the PFLP argued, the Arab regimes could survive only through support from imperialist powers and suppression of the Arab masses.

Furthermore, the PFLP rejected Fateh's "principle of nonintervention" in the affairs of Arab regimes. In contrast to Fateh's dependence on the Arab regimes, the PFLP believed that the victory of the Palestinian struggle was contingent on the success of the Arab masses in defeating those regimes. That's why it coined the famous slogan: "The road to Jerusalem begins in Cairo, Damascus, and Amman." This slogan reflected its own commitment to a broader vision of the needs of the struggle.

Hence, the PFLP made some attempt to orient itself on the struggles of Palestinian and other Arab workers and peasants. In Jordan, at the height of PLO influence in the late 1960s, the PFLP attempted to organize both Palestinian and Jordanian agricultural workers and intervened in various industrial struggles. It also organized its own popular militias, attracting many Palestinian, Jordanian, and other Arab activists. During the events of Black September in 1970, these militias fought bravely, yet unsuccessfully, to stop King Hussein's assault on the PLO.

In 1970, the PFLP was forced, along with the other PLO factions, to leave Jordan for Lebanon. During the 1970s and 1980s, it tried to maintain its commitment to the liberation of Palestine. During the Lebanese civil war, for example, the PFLP fought on the side of other Lebanese leftist and Islamic militias against the Israel-backed, pro-fascist Maronite militias. Its members helped to defend Palestinians and the PLO against the Israeli onslaught in the 1982 Lebanon war. And its cadres, along with other forces, played on-the-ground leadership roles in the early stages of the 1987–93 Intifada in the Occupied Territories.[23]

The PFLP led a "Rejectionist Front" of Palestinian organizations against the PLO's adoption of the "mini-state" formula in 1974. Despite its radical critique of PLO strategy, the PFLP suffered from a series of major contradictions and weaknesses. These problems prevented it from building a revolutionary alternative to Fateh.

First, while it rejected, correctly, the notion that some Arab regimes were socialist, the PFLP made a false distinction between reactionary regimes that accommodated to imperialism and progressive nationalist ones that were forced to fight against it. Thus, based on this distinction, the PFLP allied itself with a number of repressive Arab governments, such as the Ba'athist regime in Iraq and the Assad regime in Syria. Ultimately, these alliances cost the PFLP its political independence and reduced it to a tool in the hands of some Arab rulers.

Second, the PFLP, similar to the rest of the Stalinist left in the Arab world, allied itself with what it considered to be "real" socialist societies, the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc. This meant that, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the PFLP was regularly manipulated by the Soviet Union and forced to adapt to the cold war needs of Soviet foreign policy in the area. Its vision of Marxism-Leninism was expressed in the Cuban

Revolution, where a small group of guerrillas defeated a US-backed dictator and, a few years later, declared Cuba a socialist society. Cuban workers and peasants did not take part in making the revolution.

Finally, the PFLP's chief tactical contribution to the growing Palestinian movement in 1968–72 was its use of airline hijackings to publicize the Palestinian cause.[24] As a result, it substituted the actions of its small, committed membership for the mass struggle of the Arab workers and peasants it aimed to relate to. As the Palestinians faced one of the world's chief military powers, it became apparent that guerrilla tactics alone could not win. And although millions of people across the Arab world supported the Palestinians' armed struggle, the nature of that struggle prevented them from taking part. Therefore, the reliance on this tactic left the PFLP (and PLO) militias relatively small in size and unable to pose a serious military threat to Israel. Also, more critically, it isolated the PFLP from the mass struggles that took place against the Arab regimes and US imperialism in the late 1960s and early 1970s—especially the workers' and students' movement in Egypt (1968–72).[25]

Unfortunately, the PFLP's political weaknesses left it ill equipped to respond to changing circumstances in the Middle East and returned to its role as internal critic of Fateh in the PLO. By the mid-1980s, as the PFLP failed to have much impact on Fateh's search for the mini-state solution, it joined Fateh and other PLO factions in support of the 1983 Arab summit proposal for a mini-state in Gaza and the West Bank. Effectively, the PFLP adopted Fateh's two-state solution.[26]

The DFLP began in 1969 as a left-wing split from the PFLP. While it shared the PFLP's politics overall, the DFLP rejected the distinction between reactionary and nationalist Arab regimes. This distinction, the DFLP argued, simply allowed the PFLP to rely on petit-bourgeois regimes that were inconsistent in their fight against imperialism. Instead, the DFLP argued correctly that the Arab working classes are the only social force capable of defeating Israel and US imperialism. The DFLP was the first of the Palestinian resistance groups to work with allies in the Israeli left. It pioneered the idea that Palestinians should fight for a "secular, democratic state" in Palestine, where Arabs and Jews would have equal rights.

However, following the defeat of the PLO in Black September, the DFLP shifted sharply to the right. Using the mechanical, Stalinist theory of stages, in which "democratic" demands (for example, national liberation) were to be prioritized and achieved before the struggle for socialism could begin, the DFLP abandoned its previous radical positions. The DFLP now argued that the revolutionary left should put the goal of socialism or the total liberation of Palestine on hold. Instead, the left must strive, in the short term, to build a Palestinian state "in any liberated piece of land Israel could be forced to give up." In 1974, DFLP leader Nayef Hawatmeh called for the formation of a Palestinian "national authority" in Gaza and the West Bank, believing that the Palestinian mini-state could be achieved through the peace process. This meant that four long years before Arafat himself dared to utter it, the Palestinian left was actually ready to recognize the state of Israel and accept the two-state solution. Since the early 1970s, the DFLP has, even more than the PFLP, simply tailed Fateh's compromises and zigzags.[27]

The Islamic opposition

The failure of the PLO and its left wing over the past 30 years to provide a clear, effective leadership in the national struggle or to win any of the rights that millions of Palestinians desperately await has hurt the credibility of secular organizations. Moreover, the antidemocratic and corrupt practices of the Palestinian Authority (PA) have turned many more ordinary Palestinians against it. These conditions explain why, in recent years, a large section of Palestinian society has looked to the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and, to a lesser degree, the Islamic Jihad, to resist Israel.

Hamas's formal opposition to the Oslo Accords and Palestinian negotiators' endless concessions resonated with people who recognized the futility of negotiations. Its insistence on the liberation of the whole of Palestine connects with the aspirations of Palestinian refugees to return to their country.

From 1967 until the outbreak of the First Intifada in 1987, the Muslim Brotherhood dominated the Islamic movement in Palestine. The Brotherhood attracted a considerable number of people who were alienated by the miserable conditions under Israeli occupation. However, the Brotherhood refused to play any active role in resisting Israel. Instead, it

focused on missionary work, such as the construction of mosques, and providing various social and health services to needy Palestinians. The organization's nonpolitical position increasingly frustrated many of its younger cadres. As a result, in the late 1970s, some of these cadres began to look to the more radical Egyptian Islamic Jihad.[28] This younger generation admired the political activism of the Egyptian organization, known predominantly for its role in the assassination of (the pro-Israel) President Sadat in 1981. Eventually, these disgruntled elements broke with the Muslim Brotherhood to form the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Islamic Jihad rejected the nonpolitical stance of the Brotherhood, as well as the PLO's two-state solution compromise. It maintained, as the PLO and its left did at one point, that an armed struggle (this time by an "Islamic vanguard") was still necessary to liberate the whole of Palestine. Therefore, throughout the 1980s, Jihad carried out military attacks on Israeli targets, though Israel's overwhelming military superiority kept Islamic Jihad's influence relatively limited.[29]

The outbreak of the first Palestinian Intifada in 1987 fundamentally changed the fortunes of the Islamic opposition. Under the pressure of the first Intifada, the Muslim Brotherhood realized that it either had to drop its nonpolitical approach or risk losing all credibility among Palestinians. Therefore, in 1988, the Brotherhood formed a political wing, Hamas, to organize resistance to Israel.

Hamas's own original charter reflected the Palestinians' disappointment with the failure of the PLO's diplomatic efforts and maneuvers to secure any of their lost rights. Sections of Hamas's charter express this sentiment:

> There is no solution to the Palestinian problem except by Jihad (Holy Struggle). The initiatives, proposals and International Conferences are but a waste of time, an exercise in futility. The Palestinian people are too noble to have their future, their right and their destiny submitted to a vain game.[30]

It rejected Arafat's decision to recognize the state of Israel at the 1988 session of the PNC in Algeria. And, while the PLO was busy preparing to use the Intifada as a bargaining chip to force Israel to the negotiating table, Hamas began to gain more popular support by playing a leading role in street protests and confrontations with the Israeli army.

As millions of Palestinians grew impatient with the continued arrogance of Israel and Arafat's endless compromises, Hamas gained more popular support. Its refusal to recognize the Oslo Accords and willingness of its members to sacrifice themselves in military attacks on Israeli targets earned them the respect of people who face Israeli bombardment on a daily basis.[31] By early 2002, Palestinian opinion polls showed support for Islamist groups drawing even with, or even exceeding, support for Arafat's secular Fateh movement.

The increased support for Hamas currents does not mean that they offer any solution for Palestinians. Hamas believes in the sanctity of private property and supports a market-based economy. This belief leads it to have a contradictory position toward US imperialism. On one hand, it finds itself pitted against the US due to US support for Israel. On the other, Hamas tends to adopt the market ideas pushed by the US—and its financial arms in the area, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank—that are responsible for the misery of millions of Arab workers and peasants. Furthermore, due to its conservative ideology, Hamas is unable to challenge the Arab regimes that ally themselves with the US, especially the right-wing monarchies in the Gulf, such as Saudi Arabia. In this way, Hamas agrees with Fateh's costly principle of noninterference in the affairs of Arab countries.

Hamas's leadership is drawn primarily from middle-class elements. Therefore, it tends to sympathize with the goals of the Palestinian bourgeoisie. Like Fateh, Hamas also believes in the necessity of an alliance between all classes in Palestinian society. In practice, this means that the interests of Palestinian refugees and workers must be subordinated to those of Arafat and the bourgeoisie. On more than one occasion, Hamas leadership has indicated its readiness to accept Oslo and live with the state of Israel. As early as 1993, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the political leader of Hamas, indicated that the movement could accept a two-state solution: "It is perceivable to declare a cease-fire with Israel for 10, perhaps 20 years if a Palestinian state is established."[32]

Despite Hamas's critique of the PLO's insistence on a strategy of compromise, it continues to defer to the PLO (and Arafat) as the legitimate leader of the Palestinian nationalist movement. Hamas regards itself simply as one component of that movement:

> The PLO is among the closest to the Hamas, for it constitutes a father, a brother, a relative, a friend. Can a Muslim turn away from his father, his brother, his relative or his friend? Our homeland is one, our calamity is one, our destiny is one and our enemy is common to both of us.[33]

While the PA imprisoned and tortured its members, Hamas insisted on the need "to maintain open dialogue with Arafat and cooperation with the PA in all areas of self-autonomy." This conciliatory approach toward the PA has angered many rank-and-file cadres of the organization.[34]

Oslo and the crisis of perspectives

Three decades ago, millions around the world regarded the PLO as one of the main national liberation movements in the world, on par with the Vietnamese National Liberation Front and the African National Congress of South Africa. Tragically, today the PLO is a shadow of its former self. It has all but given up on its initial goals of liberating Palestine and replacing Israel with a secular, democratic state.

The Oslo "peace process" trapped the main forces of the Palestinian national liberation movement in a cul-de-sac. The PLO, reconstituted as the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza after the 1993 Oslo Accords, unashamedly cooperates with both Israel's internal security service (Shinbet) and the CIA to curb Palestinian militants. It claims that such cooperation is needed to persuade Washington to support a Palestinian state. It uses its massive security forces (more than fifty thousand strong) to jail, torture, and even murder those Palestinians who oppose Oslo.[35] The PLO has ceased to be a force in the struggle against imperialism.

Incredibly, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the US in September 2001, the PLO declared itself a "partner of the US in its war against terrorism." Not only did the PLO support the bombing of Afghanistan, one of the poorest countries on earth, but its security forces shot and killed Palestinians who protested against the war.

Large numbers of Palestinians view Arafat as safeguarding Israel's security—not conducting a struggle for liberation. Many are angry, since years of negotiations have failed to end the occupation, stop the expansion of Israeli settlements, or secure the refugees' right of return. They are also angry because poverty and unemployment levels for ordinary people have

worsened, while Arafat and his cronies have made fortunes through corruption and monopolies.

Many people view the PLO's surrender to Israel and the US, as well as its internal brutality, as a case of "selling out." This view, however, overlooks the real reason behind the PLO's capitulation to the US and Israel: the class interests that have always informed the organization's policies. The PLO claimed that it represented the interests of all Palestinians. In reality, it has always served the interests of the Palestinian bourgeoisie—especially this class's desire to form its own mini-state through negotiations and compromise with the US and Israel. It has never wanted to rely on popular struggles of Palestinian or Arab masses, which could endanger the stability of both it and its Arab allies.

This fear of mass rebellion from below, which is characteristic of all ruling classes, explains why the PLO has always had a contradictory attitude toward mass struggles. The PLO needs some form of struggle to pressure Israel into making concessions, but it constantly has to try (sometimes unsuccessfully) to keep any such struggles, especially the Intifadas, under its own control. It also explains why the PLO always supports its Arab allies when they are faced with a threat from their own working classes. In 1970, for example, the PLO chose to leave Jordan rather than challenge and destabilize the authoritarian regime of King Hussein. In 1988 and 1989, it chose to support the Algerian and Jordanian governments against two popular uprisings that the first Intifada inspired.[36]

In response to the Oslo Accords in 1993, the established Palestinian left harshly criticized Arafat for signing a treaty that only benefited Israel and failed to guarantee any of the Palestinians' fundamental rights. The two organizations joined with eight other radical Palestinian organizations to boycott the PA. In 1996, the PFLP formally withdrew from the PLO. But after 1994, the PA increasingly shaped Palestinian politics. PFLP and DFLP leaders opposed participation in the 1996 legislative council elections. This provoked an organizational split in the DFLP, spawning another party (FIDA) that ran candidates and took a position in the PA. Supporters of the PFLP in the electorate largely ignored the leadership's calls for boycotts, and many party members ran as independents without official PFLP backing.[37]

As Arafat prepared to enter into "final status" negotiations with Israel when the Oslo Accords' transition period ran out in 1999, the DFLP and PFLP entered into negotiations with Arafat to prepare a united national stance. Most Palestinian political observers interpreted these moves as these groups' admission that they had failed to develop a coherent opposition to the Oslo process. At the time, the late PFLP leader Abu Ali Mustafa admitted that the opposition "has failed to transform its political discourse into practical, material action."[38] In 1999, both groups endorsed Arafat's plan to reach a "final status" agreement with Israel.

The failure of the secular left to build a left opposition to Fateh and the Palestinian Authority stems from their failure to apply their initial insights on the reactionary nature of the Arab ruling classes to the Palestinian bourgeoisie itself. As the Jerusalem-based socialist magazine *Challenge* explained:

> At first, when the Oslo Accords were signed, the leftist parties began a campaign against them, calling on the Palestinians to boycott the Palestine Authority (PA) which had joined the colonialist system. The aim was to bring the bourgeoisie back into the national camp. When this failed, the organized Left decided to acknowledge Oslo as a fait accompli; it began calling for national unity, this time on the basis of simply "overlooking" Oslo. Instead of doing its utmost to isolate the bourgeoisie from the masses, the Palestinian Left put all its efforts into finding a national common denominator with the bourgeoisie. The latter, of course, never committed itself to this common denominator. The bourgeois simply used the concept to cover up their surrender so as to keep their grip on the masses. The illusion of national unity among all classes served bourgeois interests and prevented the Left from fulfilling its strategic task: to create a political alternative.[39]

Both the PFLP and DFLP have simply become a left, loyal opposition to Arafat.[40] In fact, their influence has fallen so far that journalist Graham Usher, a longtime observer of Palestinian politics, declared them politically impotent:

> The future alliance of the national movement is between mainstream nationalists, Fateh, and the Islamicists. The leftists, the Communists, the Democratic Front (DF), and the Popular Front (PF) are nowhere. They are history. They have no road. They follow Fateh and Hamas. The Popular Front resumed armed actions in the last two months [in summer 2001—*ed.]* purely and simply because they are copying Fateh, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad. Same with the Democratic Front. So the secular left … no longer makes the decisions. It's Hamas and Fateh. Arafat has had to share power with [Hamas].[41]

Since Oslo, the PLO has felt itself under pressure from above and below. From above, it is under pressure from the US and Israel to continue with concessions and crackdowns on militants. From below, mass anger at endless and fruitless concessions, which exploded in the form of the al-Aqsa Intifada, limits Arafat's ability to make certain concessions. Arafat was not totally off the mark when he reportedly told president Bill Clinton that he feared he would be assassinated if he were to make any more concessions to Israel during the 2000 Camp David negotiations.

The socialist alternative

Both the First Intifada and the al-Aqsa Intifada have shown that, despite its massive military might and US support, Israel cannot silence the Palestinian question. However, they have also shown that the struggle of the Palestinians alone cannot defeat Israel.

In its initial stages, the al-Aqsa Intifada combined mobilization of the Palestinian population with military attacks on Israeli soldiers and settlers. Because the Arafat regime saw the Intifada as a bargaining chip to restart negotiations with Israel, it wound up the popular aspects of the uprising and increasingly turned the conflict into sporadic military confrontations. Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the US, the Sharon government stepped up its military assault on the Palestinians. Sharon declared his intention to use the "war on terrorism" to crush all resistance and to impose an apartheid system on Palestinians. This raised the stakes in the liberation struggle. Only a strategy that involves the mass of Palestinians—not one that vacillates between isolated guerrilla actions and negotiations that simply reinforce Israeli domination over Palestine—can defend the liberation movement.

In the near term, a strategy of a mass Intifada—combining military tactics with mass actions of Palestinian "civil society" (such as trade unions and popular committees)—can move the struggle in a direction more favorable to the Palestinians. This kind of strategy has the potential to raise the costs of the occupation and to break Israeli morale. It can give confidence to those on the other side of the Green Line—military resisters, Israeli supporters of Palestinian rights, and Palestinians living in Israel—to demonstrate their solidarity. This kind of strategy would also shift the balance in Palestinian society toward ordinary Palestinians and democracy

and away from the Arafat cronies and corrupt PA officials who sought to rule an Oslo-imposed Bantustan in collaboration with Israel.

Even if the Palestinians drove Israel out of the territories occupied in 1967, this achievement would not amount to the liberation of Palestine. The Zionist state would still exist, and Palestinians would not have won their right to return to their historic homeland. Palestinian oppression is firmly built into the US-supported state system in the Middle East. Therefore, Palestinian liberation depends on ending that state system and forming a democratic, secular state in all of historic Palestine where Jews and Arabs can live as equals. The only force capable of achieving that task is the working class of the region. This point in no way diminishes the centrality of Palestinian struggle and sacrifice. It only stresses that for Palestinians to finally liberate themselves, Arab workers have to shake off their chains, too.

Millions of ordinary Arab people live in poverty under oppressive governments that the US supports. In addition, they see how US power enforces genocidal sanctions on Iraq that have killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and left its economy in a shambles. And they see how US power backs up Israel's denial of basic human rights to millions of Palestinians. This combination of growing class inequality in the region and the miserable conditions of both the Iraqi and Palestinian peoples is pushing many over the edge.

Deepening class anger and growing support for Iraqis and Palestinians underpinned the outbreak of mass demonstrations across Egypt immediately after the al-Aqsa Intifada began and during Israel's spring 2002 onslaught on the Occupied Territories. Tens of thousands of workers, lawyers, and students (from the college to the elementary level) took to the streets of major cities (and even villages) to show their solidarity with the Intifada. The demonstrations demanded that the Mubarak government cut diplomatic relations with Israel. These solidarity demonstrations quickly turned into protests against the Mubarak government itself. The demonstrators very quickly raised slogans and chants denouncing widespread corruption, lack of political freedoms, and austerity measures imposed by the government and the IMF. The neoliberal reforms are fueling a rising militancy among workers that has made the Egyptian government very nervous.[42]

In Jordan, for many years, Palestinian refugees and the majority of ordinary Jordanians have suffered due to harsh economic conditions caused by the sanctions against Jordan's main trade partner, Iraq, as well as vicious austerity programs imposed by a corrupt monarchy. As in Egypt, during the 2002 Israeli invasion, thousands of people took to the streets to support it. Since then, the Jordanian government, on more than one occasion, had to call the army to control pro-Palestinian demonstrators.

Demonstrations have also taken place in Morocco, Syria, and even in the Gulf countries of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, where protests of this type were far less common. The evolution of solidarity protests with the Intifada into anti-government protests highlighted, once again, the close connection between the plight of the Palestinians and struggle of the Arab working classes for democracy. It showed the radicalizing impact that the Palestinian struggle has always had on Arab workers. Time and again, the Palestinian national liberation struggle has inspired both Arab workers and students to resist their own repressive governments, as well as US domination in the Middle East.

Millions of Arabs who were demoralized by Israel's 1967 victory over the Arab regimes drew hope from the armed resistance of the PLO. The PLO's resistance proved that it was still possible to fight both Israel and US imperialism. The PLO's initial military successes against Israel (1968–70), in turn, gave confidence to ordinary Arabs to resist their own bankrupt and humiliated regimes. Mass movements of workers and students in Egypt (1968–72) and Jordan (1970) challenged these regimes. Reciprocally, thousands of youths and revolutionaries from around the Middle East flocked to join the PLO's militias.

Spontaneous struggles of Arab workers or students will not be enough to defeat Israel and US imperialism. A socialist alternative rooted in the day-to-day struggles of Arab workers against the oppression and the corruption of their own regimes must be built. It must reject the PLO's (and the Arab regimes') collaboration with Israel and the United States. And, it must fight for an Arab world run democratically by the workers who create all its oil wealth. The nationalist tradition, embodied most in the mainstream PLO, ran into the cul-de-sac of Oslo. This offered an opening to the Islamists, whose militancy covers for a reactionary social agenda.

Real hope for the future in Palestine lies in the building of a genuine socialist alternative to these politics. Building such an alternative will not be an easy task in Palestine or in the rest of the Arab world, given the level of repression by the PA and other Arab governments. Moreover, a new generation of socialists has to overcome the legacy of Stalinism and its harmful impact on the left. This will require the rediscovery of the real Marxist tradition, which has always looked to struggles of the working class—and not to Stalinist Russia or some authoritarian Arab regime that calls itself "socialist" or "progressive"—as the way to change society. It will be critical for us to learn from the mistakes of the old Stalinist organizations and connect these lessons to the struggles of today.



Part 2

The Road to Jerusalem Goes through Cairo



4

Not an Ally

The Israeli Working Class[1]

Daphna Thier

The working class is the only class with both the interest and ability to overthrow capitalism. Though workers can harbor prejudices, or act selfishly, or even act against their own interests, they are ultimately the gravediggers of the system. In *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, Hal Draper explained the material reasoning behind Marx's hypothesis: workers are concentrated in workplaces and compelled to work together. They suffer similar conditions and must unite when negotiating better terms. But by negotiating for more, workers come up against the system itself—their needs naturally conflict with the needs of capitalist profit making.[2]

Because a worker creates wealth by producing profitable commodities for the capitalist, but does not enjoy this wealth herself, she is alienated from her own labor and by extension from the world she lives in. This makes the worker less attached to "the way things are." More important,

because workers are at the helm of production, performing "indispensable services," they possess real power within the system. Draper wrote, "This class is at the levers of economic power not by conscious decision but by its objective conditions of existence." And for these reasons, socialists believe in the centrality of class struggle and in the working class as the only class with the ability to abolish the old order and build society anew.[3]

Is the Israeli working class an exception to this rule? And if so, what makes it one? Whether or not this working class is revolutionary becomes critical when determining which strategies will advance revolution in the Middle East and which will not. Since the founding of Israel, its workers have embraced racist ideas, nationalist sentiment, consistent opposition to democracy, and support for counterrevolutionary regimes. Can this be otherwise?

Some socialists believe that the Israeli working class is part of the solution in the Middle East. For example, because Israelis oppose the democratization of their state, the Committee for a Workers International and its US affiliate, Socialist Alternative, conclude that fighting for a single, secular, nonexclusivist democratic state is a "bourgeois national utopia."[4] Similarly, the International Marxist Tendency says that the international campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel is "counter-productive, and a campaign that strengthens bourgeois Zionism."[5] These views start from the assumption that the Jewish Israeli working class can be won to a revolutionary perspective and class solidarity with Arab workers, and so we must avoid alienating them by fighting for democratic reform. They ignore the facts: that the Palestinian people were ethnically cleansed at the hands of Israeli labor, that Israeli workers took their lands at gunpoint; and that rank-and-file Israeli workers by and large hold right-wing positions on the question of Palestinian rights and have overwhelmingly supported the bombardment of Gaza and the continued occupation of the West Bank.

The class character of Israel

A seminal socialist analysis of "The Class Character of Israel" grappled with this question almost fifty years ago.[6] Writing in 1969, two Israeli anti-Zionist socialists, Moshe Machover and Akiva Orr of the Israeli Socialist

Organization (commonly known by the name of its newspaper, *Matzpen*), argued that the Israeli working class had a vested economic interest in maintaining racist divisions; that a *material* reality prevented Jewish class solidarity with Palestinians.[7]

The authors argued that even though Israel is a class society with class conflicts, there is an overarching conflict between Zionism and the indigenous population. They argued that the "external conflict" isn't a derivative of the class conflict. The material benefits afforded the Israeli working class bond it to the settler-colonial state. Therefore its class antagonism with Israeli capital is subordinated to cross-class unity against Palestinians. Rather, it blunts the class conflict because Israeli workers support the colonial state and uphold imperial interests.

Why does this matter? Because if revolution requires the overthrow of the state, but the Israeli working class is invested in the existence of the Zionist state, then it is an obstacle rather than an agent of revolution.

Much of the original Matzpen argument rested on the observation that foreign capital subsidized and "bought off" the Israeli working class in the form of governmental social spending. Since 1969 much has changed, and their analysis must be reassessed and updated. Israeli workers' living standards have eroded and real wages have steadily declined. Today, the bulk of foreign support is *military* funding. Finally, American aid, steadily three billion dollars annually for the last couple of decades, is proportionately less of an influence on the Israeli economy (as it had been into the early '90s). So the basis of the argument—that the Israeli working class's high living standards rest on imperialist social subsidies—is weakened.[8]

Machover and Orr wrote with remarkable insight:

> The experience of fifty years does not contain a single example of Israeli workers being mobilized on material or trade-union issues to challenge the Israeli regime itself; it is impossible to mobilize even a minority of the proletariat in this way. On the contrary, Israeli workers nearly always put their national loyalties before their class loyalties. Although this may change in the future, this does not remove the need for us to analyze why it has been so for the last fifty years.[9]

Another fifty years have passed and, still, there are no real examples to contradict this assessment.

The Israeli working class stands apart from others for three reasons: First, examining the formative years of the Jewish working class in Palestine, we can see that it is the nature of a settler working class and its unique relationship to the state that distinguishes the Israeli proletariat from other working classes. Second, the 1967 occupation served to deepen the connection between the working class and the colonial state. Finally, the Palestinian national liberation struggle negates the privileges of, and therefore is opposed by, the colonizing working class.

A settler-colonial working class

Many modern working classes, such as those in the US, Australia, or Canada, have their origins in settler colonies. The Israeli experience presents a variant of this. Sociologist Gershon Shafir identifies five different forms of settler societies: the military occupation, the plantation, the ethnic plantation, the mixed settlement, and the pure settlement.[10] The occupation strives to "exploit and intensify the existing economic order rather than seeking direct control of local land and labor," meaning that it does not replace the existing society but merely exploits it; in the plantation settlement, the European settlers imported indentured or slave labor and constituted themselves as the local ruling elite; in the ethnic plantation settlement, the mixed settlement, and the pure settlement, the goal is to erect a society to be dominated by a European national identity. In the ethnic plantation settlement, local labor is employed but the settlement possesses a European identity, which rejects ethnic mixture. In the mixed society, some form of caste system is established, coercing local labor to comply, along with a certain degree of interracial relations.

The pure settlement establishes an economy based on European labor, removes the native population, and establishes a "sense of cultural or ethnic homogeneity identified with a European concept of nationality."[11] That is, European societies consciously replace indigenous ones with an exclusive society. Significantly, what we will see is that this form of settlement *requires an integral laboring class committed to the nation-building project.*

Marxists should not identify these examples as fixed realities, rather as a *spectrum* over which a settlement can *evolve.* The South African model

evolved in the 1800s from a plantation settlement to an ethnic plantation settlement—where white labor existed alongside Black labor in a strict caste system that was later codified as apartheid. By 1910 white labor had won the right to reserve skilled positions, and in 1948 Black workers were forced into Bantustans and formally stripped of civil rights. Like in Israel, the dispossession of the indigenous population went hand in hand with a welfare state benefiting the oppressor working class. Unlike in Israel, this settlement never sought to eliminate indigenous workers.

At its core the settler-colonial society is based on what Australian historian Patrick Wolfe called a "logic of elimination." Whereas an immigrant joins the society found upon arrival, settlers carry their own sovereignty with them—challenging and, if successful, *displacing* the indigenous society. Wolfe argues that a settler movement aims to build something new, which, in the negative, necessarily implies eliminating the existing society.[12] Elimination can be achieved through expulsion, death, or assimilation. Where elimination is impossible, separation is the next viable option to settlers. In either case, the result is the same: one society displacing another.

The first Zionist immigration wave, the "First Aliyah," fits best within the ethnic plantation category.[13] Zionists established settlements for agricultural cultivation with a capitalist benefactor and employed local indigenous labor. After 1904 the project developed into its pure form, when Zionists arrived and rejected the "elitist" use of indigenous labor, emphasizing the development of a new, "stronger" Jew who could work the land himself.

With time the Zionist plan evolved into the complete dispossession of Palestinians. But in 1947–48, the "logic of elimination" and the Zionist goal to create their own sovereign state led them to accept a sort of territorial compromise—separation. In 1948, they preferred to forgo historic Palestine in its entirety in order to maintain a demographic majority and an economy protected from Arab labor and production.

In the pure settlement, expansion rests on the commitment of a laboring class. This is because land settlement requires labor and large numbers of people. If it is to be done at the exclusion of the local population, then the settlers themselves must fulfill this need. The commitment of a laboring class to colonization can only be expected when it is offered a stake in the

settlement, an incentive to sacrifice and to struggle against the indigenous population.

In Palestine, this incentive was given through direct capital investment in the Jewish working class.[14] It was implemented through institutions historically associated with the "Labor Alignment" in Israel: the Labor Party and the kibbutz. Primitive accumulation at the expense of the native population in this case *benefited Jewish workers directly*, such as the examples described below of giving away, or selling cheaply, land taken from Palestinians. Ultimately, the working class was intimately involved in replacing Palestinian society, thus excluding Palestinian labor.[15]

The process of colonization in Palestine is still very much unfolding. The state is expanding settlements into the West Bank, the al-Naqab desert —where it continues to displace Bedouin villages—and it maintains the potential to settle other nearby territories (for instance, Gaza). There also continues to be a large diaspora of Palestinians, roughly 10 million people, scattered around the region and the world. Many wish to return and all of them are owed reparations.

Ethnic cleansing, Zionism's original sin

True to the nature of settler colonialism, the foundation of the Israeli state was completed through the near total destruction of Palestinian existence. And the major perpetrators of the ethnic cleansing came from the *left wing* of the labor movement, particularly from members of the United Workers Party (MAPAM).[16] Joel Benin writes, "Most of the officers of the Palmah, Haganah and subsequently the IDF were MAPAM members, MAPAM assumed political and operational responsibility for conducting Israel's war of independence."[17]

MAPAM kibbutzim and other Jewish settlements drove Palestinians off their lands and harvested their crops. With cover provided by Soviet Union arguments that the Arab militaries and their British backers were reactionary, these settlers argued that establishing a Jewish state was a blow against British imperialism.

The appropriation of Palestinian property, argues Benin, was a form of primitive accumulation that allowed Jewish economic development,

particularly in agriculture. And as Machover and Orr explained in their essay, it was not the bourgeoisie that initially appropriated this stolen capital but the state and Labor Party bureaucracy. Vacated Palestinian real estate was then distributed to Israel's Jewish population, which more than doubled in its first four years. By 1954, over 30 percent of the Jewish population lived in Arab property. More than 1.1 million acres of cultivable lands were confiscated from "absent, present, and 'present-absentee' Arabs,"[18] which increased Jewish farming land by 250 percent. The UN Refugee Office estimated the value of stolen wealth at more than five billion dollars in today's currency.[19]

The hegemony of the Labor Party

Founded in 1930, David Ben-Gurion's MAPAI (Workers' Party of the Land of Israel, today's Labor Party) dominated the leadership of the General Confederation of Hebrew Labor, HaHistadrut.[20] After statehood, MAPAI institutions took over management of imported capital.[21] MAPAI was able to satisfy the material needs of workers *and* subsidize business interests, because of billions of dollars in unilateral foreign investment in the state: donations from world Jewry, reparations from West Germany, and US government grants.[22]

Ben-Gurion, serving as the Histadrut secretary and later as Israel's first prime minister, established a tripartite agreement between the state, bourgeoisie, and labor, sometimes referred to as corporatism.[23] This arrangement incorporated the expropriated Arab property and created a segregated labor market employing Jews exclusively (with few exceptions) before 1967. To this day, Jews and Arabs rarely work together in a highly stratified labor market.

Expropriation, segregation, and foreign capital together offered rising living standards to the working class. In exchange, MAPAI demanded strict discipline, justified by the "constant conflict with the Arabs." Because the Histadrut and the state employed fully 40 percent of Israelis in the first two decades of Israel's existence, they shared an interest with the capitalists in restraining worker militancy. In fact their strength was derived from the ability to do so.

A singular exception to MAPAI's iron grip was the forty-three-day seamen's strike in late 1951. The seamen, who worked for the Histadrut-owned shipping company ZIM, challenged the top-down nature of trade unionism in Israel and MAPAI's control of it. But even in this case, only two of the strikers came to break with Zionism; one was the aforementioned author, Akiva Orr. Thus, even an exception proves the rule.

The nature of a settler working class offered it the unique position of "partner" to the state, as expressed in the tripartite agreement between the union with the government and employers. This guaranteed it protections, while simultaneously subordinating its class interests to that of the state. Israeli workers had been given (or had taken) much of the plunder in 1948; they enjoyed housing, education, and health-care benefits as afforded by the Histadrut and the state; and until 1973 enjoyed a rising standard of living, comparable not to the Arab states of the region but to Europe. So they consistently cooperated with the state and employers.

Mizrachi Jews in Israeli society

In the early years of the Israeli state, Mizrachi Jews—immigrants from countries around the Middle East and North Africa region—filled the unskilled positions that veteran white Jews no longer cared for. They were then denied training that may have allowed them to advance. Thus began a long legacy of inter-Jewish racial discrimination.

Mizrachi Jews today constitute about half of the Jewish population. They make up a majority of the Jewish working class, blue-collar laborers and the poor. The gaps today between Ashkenazi (usually of Eastern European descent) and Mizrachi Jews are greater as a result of the early policies of discrimination,[24] low levels of social mobility, and the advent of neoliberal policies undermining social protections. Overall, upper- and middle-class Jews of European descent, whose parents own land and who have well-paid jobs, continue to enjoy greater benefits from the occupation.

However, even though Mizrachi Jews face discrimination, they are equally as patriotic as their Ashkenazi compatriots. The fact that they tend to supply the voting base for the right-wing parties in the Knesset has even led many to conclude that they are more racist than Ashkenazis. In actuality, Israeli-born Jews tend to be more right wing than their parents who

emigrated from Arab or Muslim-majority countries, so their country of origin or ethnicity cannot explain their racism. It would be much more accurate to identify class and education as factors in levels of hawkishness.

While Liberal Zionism (an Ashkenazi creation) is often perceived as a less hawkish ideology, it is in reality thoroughly racist. Liberal or Labor Zionism is based on the romantic notion of a "return to the East" but rejects all Easternism, perhaps with the exception of its cuisine. That includes Eastern *Jews*. Though Jews of the Orient were often seen as a link to the Jewish mythical past, they were looked down on by their European brethren. The founding Zionist philosopher, Abba Eban, expressed Labor Zionist thinking about Mizrachi Jews when he said: "Far from regarding our immigrants from Oriental countries as a bridge towards our integration with the Arab-speaking world, our object should be to infuse them with an occidental spirit, rather than to allow them to drag us into an unnatural orientalism." And Ben-Gurion famously stated, "The Moroccan Jew took a lot from the Moroccan Arab, and I don't see much we can learn from the Moroccan Arabs. The culture of Morocco I wouldn't want to have here."[25]

Mizrachi support for the right-wing Likud (beginning in the 1960s) was a rejection of that racist Liberal Zionist establishment, which discriminated against them. It was a rebellion against the Histadrut and MAPAI, at the hands of which, writes Michael Shalev, "they were dealt with harshly by means of a 'residual' system of niggardly means-tested benefits [not employment based benefits] and manipulative forms of so-called treatment and rehabilitation."[26] These benefits were used by MAPAI to compel blue-collar Mizrachis to vote for the party and pay Histadrut membership dues.

But, while many Jews from non-Western countries identify as Oriental, few identify as Arab. This is not just because of Zionist racism. Mizrachi Jews come from a range of Arab and non-Arab countries. Libyan, Egyptian, Kurdish, Iraqi, Iranian, and Indian Jews all identify as Mizrachi, and they are not all Arab. Moroccan Jews constitute a majority of the Mizrachi population, and they too usually do not identify as Arab. While Jews inhabited Morocco, they identified, like other Moroccans, as Moroccan, not Arab.[27]

Even for those who identify as Arab (often through the experience of discrimination), Mizrachis' material conditions differ from that of

Palestinians and Arabs in the region: all Jewish citizens enjoy civil and human rights, land and homes, and social benefits that Palestinians are denied. We should not underestimate the importance of Jews of any ethnicity to the Israeli state. Unlike Palestinians, who are under constant threat of ethnic cleansing, Mizrachis are Jews and, as such, are critical to maintaining a Jewish majority. And we cannot underestimate their commitment to Israel.[28]

When fighting for their right to equality and upward mobility within Israeli society, Mizrachis fight for rights that are necessarily gained at the expense of Palestinians. The fact that the lower income bracket in Israel tends to be more right-wing is testament to the bitterness of their battle for Palestine's resources. The labor struggles and political strikes in Israel that have challenged settler colonialism and anti-Palestinian racism—have been Palestinian.[29]

Occupation and neoliberalism

Today, it is hard to dispute that Israel is a capitalist society. However, Israel's early development was based on substantial state ownership in the economy and an extensive welfare state that masked its true character. This led many to label it a "socialist" or "social democratic" state. However, even in those early days of Labor dominance, the foundations of a powerful, highly concentrated capitalist class were forming.

Until the late 1950s, the system, aided by mass immigration, worked effectively, and the economy consistently expanded. In the 1960s, however, immigration and foreign investment both dropped, resulting in diminished economic growth and finally stagnation. Meanwhile, the near full-employment economy weakened the labor bureaucracy. An upsurge of rank-and-file activity and wildcat strikes challenged the Histadrut and government's authority, and MAPAI's legitimacy as mediator between the working class and private employers. So, ironically, full employment undermined the Labor Party and the nominal trade union. These realities were further exacerbated by the emergence of employers with great economic and political strength that chose to circumvent the government in negotiations with the Histadrut.

Hoping to weaken labor militancy and to rid itself of nonprofitable and less competitive capital, the government initiated a major recession in 1966.[30] This caused a wave of bankruptcies and mergers, wiping out many smaller firms and hastening a process of consolidation of private capital. But it did not spur growth.

The 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza significantly increased Israel's domestic market while providing cheap and highly exploitable Palestinian labor. By the mid-1980s Palestinian workers made up 7 percent of the Israeli labor force. Introducing this pool of marginal labor tempered Jewish workers. It offered a new sector of blue-collar workers' opportunities to advance. David Hall-Cathala, who studied the Israeli peace movement between 1967 and 1987, wrote:

> To begin with, the occupation of the territories opened up new markets and provided a vast cheap labour reserve. This led to an economic independence and upward mobility for many Mizrachim, which had interesting results. Firstly, they came to favour the occupation, not because they desired to settle the territories but because the influx of cheap Arab labour meant that many of them no longer had to do the work of the "Arab riff-raff."[31]

Israel's new territorial expansion also came with advantageous terms for trade in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and the Sinai Peninsula. The state was able to import cheap oil and other resources and export merchandise to a captive market.

And so the occupation was beneficial to the Israeli capitalists, state, and workers. Shalev writes that the maintenance of the occupation "reflected the vested interests of the occupation's economic beneficiaries [employers as well as workers] in Israel."[32] As a result the state has maintained a quasi-war economy since.

The 1967 occupation also changed the character of American aid to more heavily emphasize military investment. Meanwhile, the advent of neoliberalism under American direction offered deregulation and tax benefits to corporations, wage freezes, and privatization of public enterprises beginning in the late '60s. Army generals were sent to American business schools and charged with the management of industry. In time those former generals and their elite families divided the spoils among themselves, laying the basis for a deeply corrupt capitalist elite.

The state as a cocoon

In the early years the welfare structure, which offered Israeli workers high living standards, worked in conjunction with state subsidies of capital, creating a "cocoon" for business. Political economists Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler formulated the concept of the "state as cocoon." Nitzan and Bichler hypothesized that during the pre-state period, because of the absence of a Zionist capitalist class, the state-in-making took it upon itself to control investment. "But," writes Middle East expert Adam Hanieh, "this control was not antagonistic to private capital. To the contrary, from 1948 on, the state pursued policies aimed at nurturing a capitalist class by encouraging a few key families to undertake joint projects and investment with state and quasi-state enterprises."[33] This paternalism continued into the 1980s, when the independent capitalist class emerged like a moth from a cocoon.

As Nitzan and Bichler explain, in the process of developing capital a *real capitalist class* materialized to rule where previously Labor had dominated:

> On the surface, the state reigned supreme. The MAPAI government controlled the process of capital formation, allocated credit, determined prices, set exchange rates, regulated foreign trade, and directed industrial development. However, this process set in motion its own negation, so to speak, by planting the seeds from which dominant capital was subsequently to emerge. In this sense, the state acted as a cocoon for differential accumulation. The budding corporate conglomerates were initially employed as national "agents" for various Zionist projects. Eventually, though, their increasing autonomy helped them not only shed off their statist shell, but also change the very nature of the state from which they had evolved.[34]

Initially personal corruption was absent from the process of foreign funds funneled into state-sponsored enterprises. But it led to a great deal of what Machover and Orr identified as "political and social corruption." The generals who took over industry, and the wealthy families they became connected to, emerged from the era of privatization as an extremely corrupt, all-powerful elite—aided, rather than encumbered by, Labor. The privatized state enterprises and businesses that benefited from the cocoon came to be dominated by this small circle. According to Nitzan and Bichler, eight families now control the majority of the economy.[35]

Today, a great deal of personal corruption envelops the Israeli economy and society. Most notably, prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has faced four separate cases regarding dealings with the Israeli business elite: accepting bribes, seeking to buy positive media coverage, and promoting business deals and even submarine sales to the state to benefit his allies, friends, and family.[36]

The nonqualified loans and aid offered by the US government to Israel, along with the permission of massive trade deficits, enabled "the development of high value-added export industries connected to sectors such as information technology, pharmaceuticals, and security."[37] In the 1990s the US pushed for normalization of relations with Israel in the Middle East through the Oslo Accords and the subsequent peace treaty with Jordan.

This deliberate process also created a top-heavy occupational distribution. According to Israeli census figures, the percentage of Jewish employed persons classified as managers, professionals, and practical engineers, technicians, agents, and associate professionals increased from 44 percent in 1996 to 57 percent in 2016 (compared to 40 percent of the US workforce, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics). More traditionally "working-class" jobs (clerical, service and sales, construction, skilled trades, manufacturing, and "elementary occupations") have declined from 55 percent of the total to 42 percent.[38] According to these 2016 statistics, an additional 635,000, or about 17 percent of the total employed workforce, is non-Jewish. The non-Jewish section of the employed workforce is four times more likely to be employed in "elementary occupations" than are members of the Jewish workforce and almost five times *less* likely to be employed in managerial and professional occupations.[39]

Meanwhile, with the passage of an Economic Stabilization Plan and the signing of a free trade agreement with the US in 1985, Israel's Labor-led government ushered in an austerity era for the Israeli working class: wage freezes, reductions of government spending on infrastructure and education, the annulment of many public housing tenants' rights (of mostly Mizrachi populations), the privatization of health services (though health care remains universal) and welfare services (though the department remains public). So, simultaneously, economic and geopolitical forces have

polarized the Israeli Jewish workforce into a managerial/professional/technical majority and a shrinking core of the "traditional" working class that is bearing the brunt of neoliberal restructuring.

Here, an interesting comparison between Israel and another settler state, South Africa, is worth considering. Under apartheid, the South African economy combined state support for welfare benefits and full employment for white families, but with the super-exploitation of Black workers. Andy Clarno writes that both Israel and South Africa "employed violence to dispossess the colonized, exclude them from political participation, and suppress resistance. Both states also managed racial Fordist economies. They both survived waves of decolonization that transformed Africa and the Middle East from the 1950s through the 1970s."[40] In the 1980s South Africa and Israel each confronted economic crises that threatened to undermine their regimes. They both introduced neoliberal measures; in Israel this undermined the Jewish workers. In South Africa this advanced the end of formal apartheid—because the South African economy depended on Black labor (much more so than the Israeli economy did on Palestinian labor), the South African ruling class was forced to scrap its system of rule in the early 1990s. Instead, wealth gaps today create what Clarno terms "neoliberal apartheid."[41]

In Israel wealth inequality is greater than ever and second only to the US among developed nations. But statistics that calculate those gaps take into account Palestinians, who are three times as likely to be poor but are denied the same level of social spending Jewish citizens, enjoy. So the state spends 35 percent more on Jewish citizens and their standard of living, even of lower-income Jewish populations, continues to be higher than that of Palestinians.[42] And, while one in three families required welfare assistance in 2011—an increase of about 75 percent from the year 1998, according to *Haaretz*—a majority of Jewish applicants needed help with aging parents or disability and medical issues, whereas only 16 percent applied due to poverty.

State-led economic development in Israel's formative years helped to build a private, corporate capitalism that shaped the Israeli political economy. Since the mid-1980s, "orthodox," free-market policies have changed the relationship of Israeli workers to the Zionist welfare state.

Israeli workers have suffered attacks on their social rights and benefits, but they continue to enjoy benefits at the expense of Palestinians. Many have enjoyed social mobility that is de facto denied to Palestinians. At the same time, a political economy based on war and occupation provides new ways of integrating the Israeli working class into the Zionist project.

Arms economy

The American arms industry benefited from their government's aid to Israel in the form of military equipment, and Israeli industry moguls were likewise quick to seize opportunities. As large missiles, planes, and other vehicles were assembled on Palestinian soil, the Israeli business elite reaped the benefits and fortified their position in the global arena of arms development. Today, Israel leads the way globally in occupation and "security" technology.

One of the world's top arms exporters, Israel exports annually as much as seven billion dollars' worth of military technology, or 2.2 percent of its gross domestic product. An additional 1.35 percent of GDP is dedicated to military research and development, and 6.7 percent is spent on its defense budget—the world's second-largest military budget as a percentage of GDP, after Saudi Arabia. All told, 10.25 percent of the Israeli economy is involved directly in arms. Comparatively, that of the US, the world's top weapons exporter, hovers around 3.7 percent. Israel is actually the world's largest arms supplier *per capita*, earning $98 per capita. It is followed, distantly, by Russia at $58 per capita, and Sweden, at $53.[43]

These figures do not include the contribution from natural resources exploited under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza.[44] They do not factor in the service sector's revenue or the general industry and construction taking place in the West Bank. Such figures are difficult to quantify, since many companies operate in the West Bank but have offices in Tel Aviv to obscure where operations take place. Nor does this account for Israeli exports into the Occupied Territories, which account for 72 percent of Palestinian imports and 0.16 percent of Israeli GDP. The Israeli economy is deeply involved in a web of expenditure and profit around the ongoing occupation and expansion of settlements.

With the decline of open-ended grants from outside governments, the direct economic reach of the Israeli state has diminished. In their place, US military aid has had the effect of increasing arms production.[45] No longer is foreign aid directly invested in the working class. Israeli workers are now rewarded through the arms economy. This is why, despite the economic degradation of neoliberalism, the working class remains as committed as ever to Zionism.

The working class has become dependent on the education, housing, and career opportunities that their participation in the IDF affords them. They have found routes for advancement in the military-fueled high-tech industry, with more than 9 percent of workers concentrated in high tech.[46] And as pensions and real wages are eroded, the cheaper cost of settlement living in the Occupied Territories has become essential.

Moreover, like a community based around a prison, the upkeep of life in the 1967 territories requires all sorts of services beyond the scope of the military that provide Israelis with livelihood. By shifting investment to revolve primarily around war, occupation, and arms production, the working class is now directly dependent on the war economy.

So long as Israel continues to expand, evict Palestinians from lands repurposed for Jews, and retain the land and wealth stolen in 1948, the Israeli working class constitutes a colonizing force and an enforcer of occupation. Even its most oppressed sections demand not democratic rights and equal distribution to all, but rather their own “fair share” of Zionist plunder. In an era of neoliberalism, when living standards are declining, the Israeli working class aspires to return the wealth to itself.[47] The lower the rung in society, the more bitter is this battle. And much like prisoners, Palestinians will not likely find allies in the guards and the communities whose livelihood depend on the prison. The denial of freedom to one is the precondition of the livelihood of the other.

National self-determination and the democratic question

“The nation that oppresses another nation forges its own chains,” wrote Marx. Socialists believe that the working class of an oppressor nation can’t be liberated while oppressing another. But what if it also can’t exist

otherwise? What freedoms, rights, or benefits would it give up to protect its own existence?

Socialists have a rich history of supporting national movements and struggles for democratic freedoms—insofar as they deal a blow to imperialism and oppression. We support national struggles that advance the interests of the working class: when the success of that struggle means the elimination of the common enemy, the oppressor nation. But Zionism didn't dispose of a "common enemy" for the Jewish working class and their bourgeoisie. In fact it created the perpetual Arab and Palestinian "enemy."

Socialists do not support "self-determination" in the abstract. We analyze the concrete situation in which the struggle for self-determination takes place. For example, Marx opposed the "self-determination" of the Confederate States of America because it was clear that the demand for a separate state was raised to preserve chattel slavery. Israel, today, is an active settler-colonial project that relies on the continued dispossession and suppression of the will and rights of indigenous people. Palestinians are denied entrance to Israel, cannot return to their homes and lands, and are denied citizenship, equal rights, voting rights, and basic democratic and civil liberties.

Zionism hasn't advanced the international working-class movement; on the contrary, it blunted class struggle within Israel, aided and abetted imperialist nations and ruthless dictatorships across the world, and committed countless atrocities against the Palestinian people in the name of its sovereignty.

Palestinian nationalism, including the demand for a single state in which all have equal rights, advances democracy in the region by opposing a regime that supports dictatorships and imperialist policies around the world. Democratic movements against Israel play a role in advancing the liberation of the international working class. It's hard to envision a socialist revolution that wouldn't stem from an international anti-imperialist and democratic movement.

Because Palestinian rights to full citizenship—the right of return and an end to Israeli military occupation of their land, sea, and air—would end the demographic dominance of Israeli Jews and thereby the Jewish ethnocracy, a democratic revolution would undermine the Israeli working class's existence as a Jewish working class per se. A democratic solution would

overturn the numerous benefits and the wealth that undergird its standard of living. In the West Bank and Gaza, per capita GDP is around $4,300; in Israel it is roughly $35,000. Desegregation of the economies could expose Israeli workers to a free fall in living standards.

Israeli workers have, in fact, failed to draw democratic conclusions from social movements. In one notable exception in the early 1970s, the Mizrachi Israeli Black Panthers connected their oppression to the racism and discrimination Palestinians faced. This was a remarkable occurrence and was likely influenced by the Matzpen activists who supported them. Their movement was more brutally and violently suppressed than any other social justice movement in Israeli history. However, they too subordinated the question of Zionism to the economic issues they faced.

The 2011 Tent Movement, which was openly inspired by the democratic and social movement of the Arab Spring, was led mainly by middle-class Ashkenazi Jews (previously the main beneficiaries of the welfare state). Neoliberalism and privatization had benefited many of the young protesters' parents, which would explain why their demands aspired to regain lost privileges, not to do away with neoliberalism and the free market, much less the settler-colonial nature of Israel. Long-time Israeli socialist Tikva Honig-Parnass writes that "despite the call for social justice, any calls for democratic change in Israel were unequivocally rejected by the vast majority of the movement."[48] *A socialist revolution can't depend on apolitical class struggle, it must be regional and democratic and include Palestinians.*

In early December 2017 two large protest movements developed in parallel—one in the West Bank and Gaza, the other in Tel Aviv. Palestinians conducted a general strike and took to the streets to protest President Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Meanwhile, weekly anti-corruption protests against the growing scandals of Netanyahu ballooned into the tens of thousands, as a new bill was put forward to prevent the police from publicizing its findings. These protests, like the 2011 movement, rejected the politics of "left" and "right." But this rejection was not a rejection of Zionism, the establishment, or the state. In fact, what this rejection signaled was the conservative character of the demonstrators and their demands. Large Israeli flags and chants such as "Long live the Israeli nation" were a regular part of the rallies. Eldad Yaniv,

a leading figurehead of the protests, consistently called on all those who are patriots and love their country, even far-right coalition members Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked, to reject Netanyahu and those who have "wronged the Israeli people." A small handful of Israeli BDS activists who attended one protest with three large letters of B, D, and S were attacked and their signs torn apart by a mob of other protesters. In fact, not two days after Trump's announcement, there were large groups of protesters singing "Jerusalem Forever" in these marches.

Some socialists argue that the struggle for a democratic Palestine is not a feasible goal because of Israeli working-class opposition. They contend that because Palestinians, unlike Black South Africans, are a minority and do not have economic leverage they cannot overthrow the regime. Their conclusion is that the only solution is a regionwide socialist revolution.[49]

While it is true that the Palestinian question is tied to a regional solution, the assumption that the Zionist regime can only be overthrown through socialism and that therefore we must not call for a single nonexclusivist, democratic state disregards the existing Palestinian national liberation movement and its struggle for democracy. Furthermore, a regional democratic revolution, encompassing dictatorships explicitly or implicitly allied with the US and Israel (the potential of which we witnessed mostly clearly in the 2011 Arab Spring), would certainly exceed the power of the Israeli working class.

A democratic revolution will not inevitably lead to a socialist revolution, given the weakness of the socialist left in the Middle East today. However, we also cannot expect to engage the masses of Arab workers in a socialist revolution without starting with a democratic call in a region long struggling against repression, dictatorship, and imperialism. Arab workers made clear during the Arab Spring of 2011 that they yearn for democracy—and that this is directly tied to their struggle as a class. Finally, a single state in which Jews and non-Jews have equal rights creates the possibility of the foundation of a multiracial working class.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued the following: first, a settler-colonial working class relates to the state in a fundamentally different way from a traditional

working class. Given incentives to promote colonization, it acts as a collaborator with its own ruling class.

Second, the ethnic cleansing of Palestine as a form of primitive accumulation, and decades of directly benefiting from foreign funding, have allowed the Israeli working class to acquire a standard of living it is unwilling to relinquish. Insofar as this wealth has declined with the rise of neoliberalism and the deterioration of the welfare state, the working class wishes to return to an era in which it had a greater portion of the wealth offered by colonization.

I've further concluded that shifting from a welfare state to a warfare economy has deepened Israeli workers' reliance on the occupation, as a prison guard tied to the prison for livelihood.

Finally, I've contended that the self-determination and rights of Palestinians, or any indigenous population, necessarily negate the special privileges of a colonizing class. This is demonstrated clearly by Israeli opposition to BDS. The call for equal citizenship rights and the right of return, which are the central demands of the boycott movement, have been rejected by the Zionist left as well as by the Israeli working class.

However, the fact that the boycott may alienate Israelis is not an argument against it. On the contrary: the struggle for a democratic Middle East—of which the BDS movement is a central part—has the most potential to change the character of the Israeli working class from a counterrevolutionary force to a potentially revolutionary one. *It should be obvious that Israeli workers aren't incapable of solidarizing with Palestinians from a human perspective but because of their material conditions.* Were those to change through revolutionary upheaval, democratic or socialist, the Israeli working class could potentially be won to an internationalist perspective, which is fundamental to socialism. We can argue that by fighting for democracy in Palestine and changing the material realities there, we stand a chance to cut the Jewish working class from its ties to the state and free the way for socialist revolution to the benefit of all.

Our efforts should focus on democratic change and solidarity with those naturally allied to the international working class—the Arab working classes. We should develop real connections to the Palestinian national liberation struggle *wherever* it arises. We must sharpen our understanding of

the left in the Middle East, the forces organizing (often underground), and support them as they face counterrevolution in the region.

Machover and Orr predicted that a revolutionary movement of the Arab working classes would completely upend the status quo of the Middle East today, and Israel's role within it. They wrote:

> By releasing the activity of the masses through the Arab world it could change the balance of power; this would make Israel's traditional politico-military role obsolete, and would thus reduce its usefulness for imperialism. At first Israel would probably be used in an attempt to crush such a revolutionary break-through in the Arab world; yet once this attempt had failed Israel's politico-military role vis-á-vis the Arab world would be finished. Once this role and its associated privileges had been ended the Zionist regime, depending as it does on these privileges, would be open to mass challenge from within Israel itself.[50]

The waves of the Arab Spring of 2011 and 2019 were a beacon of hope in a region fraught with imperialism, autocracy, and repression. The victories of these struggles, however temporary, were a glimmer of what is possible. May the next uprising sweep away all the old ethnocracies and autocracies, sectarianism, and oppression suppressing the will of the workers today.



5

The Price of "Peace" on Their Terms

Toufic Haddad

"So we came to be seen less as revolutionaries than as politicians."

—*Salah Khalaf*

Introduction

This essay bases itself on the premise that global, regional, and local developments are creating the opportunity for a more effective Palestinian political movement to emerge.

Significant political and institutional crises in the post-2007 era have resulted in the inability of Western states to comfortably contain the contradictions they have presided over since the Second World War, particularly since the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the ascendance of neoliberalism. The resulting political polarization engendered by these crises has created new political actors searching for answers to an assortment of issues both domestic and foreign, broadly related to the priorities of the state, the relationship between the governed and the

governing, and the inequalities and contradictions this system has generated, despite its claims of democratic meritocracy.

Regionally, the eruption of the post-2010 “Arab uprisings” has also exposed the extensive sacrifices and struggles of the region’s peoples around basic civil and political rights and economic development, among other issues. The broader trend is one where popular actors are demanding more freedom, accountability, representation, and opportunity. This has repercussions regarding the question of Palestine insofar as support for Palestinian self-determination has always been organically tied to the question of Arab self-determination and regional efforts to shed colonial interference and its related authoritarianism (in other words, Western-backed dictatorships).

On the local level, while the Israeli–Palestinian peace process has clearly failed to realize Israeli–Palestinian peace, or statehood, and while Israel has used the process to expand its settler colonial grip over the 1967 Occupied Territories, while attempting to crush Palestinian national aspirations overall, the Palestinian national movement is by no means defeated.

More than a quarter century since the Oslo process began, a stasis has emerged across historical Palestine reflecting an implicit hunkering down of each of the main Palestinian communities within historical Palestine—the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jerusalem, and 1948 Palestinian communities.

Despite their obvious weaknesses vis-à-vis Zionist colonial strength, and despite the multiple setbacks of past years, the Palestinian movement has absorbed these blows, matured, and reached a complex stage in its evolution, with a diversified leadership across its localities. Each community and its leadership is engaged in a “ holding pattern” that attempts to wrestle the Israeli juggernaut to the mat with the limited means and tools at their disposal.

While the conditions for their organizing are far from ideal; while Palestinians within each cluster are indeed suffering daily and are the victims of extreme direct and structural violence and rights violations; and while cross-Palestinian cluster coordination could indeed greatly enhance effectiveness and strategy, the Palestinian national movement’s leadership and base of decision-making nonetheless remain resilient; are rooted in historical Palestine (not in diaspora); are self-consciously organized as

Palestinian (that is, they are not subsumed behind Arab or Jordanian suzerainty as had been planned by Israel and the US); and the movement overall has not conceded on the main historical demands for its liberation, including self-determination, refugee return, and the end to occupation.

While these matters may seem insignificant in light of the larger aspirations of the Palestinian people and "what could have been" had a series of errors or misjudgments not taken place, they are not inconsequential in light of Western state and Israeli state ambitions to liquidate the Palestinian cause (historically, and through the Oslo process).

This is also not to belittle the existing dangers facing the movement, or the inefficiencies or problematics of its various leaderships in each locality either, of which there are plenty. It is nonetheless an attempt to recognize the complexity of the Palestinian predicament overall and to insert a modicum of realism to the equation, while equally directing the bulk of criticism for the current Palestinian predicament where it is most deserved—at the doorstep of the perpetrators of these crimes and not at its victims.

The dynamic confluence of these international, regional, and local developments will not be a linear process, and its outcome is by no means foretold.

Despite its inevitable risks and diversions, birthing a new Palestinian movement will also entail mediating the factors that brought the contemporary Palestinian movement to its current situation, and that explain its political and institutional character, conditions, and activity. This will enable the Palestinian solidarity movement to better situate itself in light of the dynamic situation on the ground both in Palestine and in the West, given the latter's own progressive maturation. This is all the more important in light of a series of misconceptions and misunderstandings that persist among new and older activists alike regarding the peace process, the PLO, the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, and a range of issues related to developments of the past quarter century.

In this vein, there is no substitute for attempting to present a basic progressive analysis of the most important of these issues and their historical arc, which hopefully provides, together with other essays in this volume, a basis for acculturating this new movement for the historical task before it.

Reflections on Palestinian organizing from past to present

The run-up to Oslo

Let us begin with the Oslo process itself and the need to definitively debunk the prominent mythologies that continue to surround what this agreement was—and indeed wasn't.

The representation of the Oslo peace process as a bona fide peace agreement between the Israeli government and the PLO that simply soured under the misfortunes of terrorism and irrational religious intransigence and mistrust belies the historical record and quite simply is intellectually disingenuous. While the Oslo process had its critics from the very beginning, more than a quarter century after its passing a great deal more evidence has surfaced to prove that what was at play was anything but a form of historical reconciliation between Israel and the Palestinian people intended to lead toward "peace" or Palestinian statehood. On the contrary, a "peace process" mythology was deliberately cultivated to obfuscate clear shortcomings of the accords themselves, the context in which they were reached and implemented, and the ends toward which these agreements were employed. Analysis of these dimensions ultimately discloses far more problematic—in fact, sinister—agendas, not only of Israel and the US, but the entire Western bloc of states that politically and financially backed, and continue to back, the "peace process."

One would expect that a bona fide peace process would work to at least nominally address and amend the historical sources of conflict between the parties, ending the atrocious human rights situation the Palestinian people have lived in since 1948 within historical Palestine and beyond. But the Declaration of Principles signed between the PLO and Israel (known as the Oslo Accords) does not even mention the word "occupation," let alone indicate that a Palestinian state is to be its end game. These suspicious elisions should be read in parallel with the failure to adequately address political critiques of the accords themselves, which were voiced most eloquently at the time by prominent Palestinian intellectual Edward Said.[1] In fact, whole strata of Palestinian intellectuals and elites from most political factions, including within Fateh, opposed the accords and well understood they were taking place within a context of gross power asymmetry.

It was also well known that the PLO was politically and financially cornered at the time. The movement's main international political allies—the Eastern bloc and the Non-Aligned Movement—had collapsed by the time of their signing. In this regard, the Oslo process was very much a move on behalf of US imperialism to consolidate the Middle East component of its push for global hegemony, taking advantage of the historical opportunities that had arisen. This was all the more important after the 1990–91 Gulf War when the main Arab funders of the PLO stopped supporting the movement, blaming it for having sided with Iraq—a characterization that wasn't accurate, but one most Arab states used to rid themselves of their responsibilities vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue, and which they had long sought.[2]

The PLO was financially bankrupt at the time of Oslo's signing. Abu Alaa (Ahmed Qurei), a top negotiator and the chief financial officer in the PLO, recounts in his biography that the organization had less than two months' funding before it was penniless.[3] The PLO had already cut 70 percent of its budget for its "state in exile" and was teetering on the verge of collapse. This financial pressure would also come on the backdrop of a larger historical decline of the movement whereby the PLO had transitioned from a more emancipatory political agenda in its earlier days, towards a "pragmatic" alignment within the "international consensus" by the late 1980s. This included accepting the two-state solution and UN resolutions—even though institutions like the UN were gravely implicated in the creation of the Palestinian problem to begin with. Thus, the rightward shift in Palestinian politics starting in the early 1970s reached its apex around the time of Oslo, where the PLO was desperate for options that could ensure the movement's survival. Here, the nondemocratic practices that had been institutionalized in the PLO over the years of the movement's rightward shift would severely impair Palestinian institutional decision-making abilities, insofar as the survival of the personage of Arafat and the rule of the Fateh party over the PLO was equated with the survival of the movement overall.

Keep in mind that in the early 1990s, the US, through the Madrid and Washington processes, had a formal peace process going but still considered the PLO a "terrorist entity" that was not recognized by Israel or the US. Independent Palestinian representation in negotiations was thus

denied and still only formally took place through Jordan, which had its own designs on Palestine. Knowing that the PLO was cornered financially and politically—not just from the West but now also from its Arab backers, the US and Israel "put the squeeze on." Acting through Norwegian diplomacy, the US allowed for the creation of a backdoor "escape" path for Arafat, through the Oslo channel, where the surrender on important political positions could take place away from public scrutiny or democratic oversight. This was particularly needed as the official Jordanian–Palestinian delegation attending the Madrid and then Washington talks was upholding the formal PLO political positions that maintained the need to end Israeli occupation and dismantle its settlement project there.

The Oslo calculus

The Oslo back channel was the secret avenue through which the PLO conceded on two significant positions that continue to haunt the movement today: first, it accepted the concept of self-rule in the Occupied Territories without an immediate and full end to the Israeli occupation or guarantees that this would be the final outcome of the process. Without such a guarantee, this compromise created the basis for limited autonomy for the 1967 Occupied Territories (the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip), with no assurances that the process would lead to statehood or sovereignty. (As we shall see, autonomy had been a long-standing aim of the US and Israel, as their own solution to the Palestinian issue.)

Second, the PLO also accepted, through Oslo, an agreement that contained no solid guarantees that settlement construction would end. This too would prove catastrophic, as it allowed Israel to build settlements while negotiations continued, changing the strategic map that supposedly was being negotiated.

From the Palestinian leadership's perspective, acceptance of the principle of autonomy was done within a mentality whereby this was seen as accepting a temporary reality, without considering that temporariness itself could become permanent. It was also seen as facilitating the return of the PLO leadership to historical Palestine for the first time since 1948, allowing it to better organize from its natural territorial base. This was seen as a priority for the movement whose years in exile led to complicated and often tense arrangements with host countries. A not insignificant-sized

bureaucracy within the PLO, built from the high tides of Arab support for the cause, also weighed increasingly heavily on PLO decision-making, blunting its former more radical demands.

As to the issue of settlements, the PLO believed its ability to obtain a clause within the accords that stressed the agreement of both sides to "not prejudice final status negotiations"—one of which was settlements—meant that they were protected from Israeli settlement expansion. But Israel simply claimed its settlement construction was due to the "natural growth" of the settler population, because settlers have "large families," and it was unreasonable to prevent it.

Thus, while the PLO was aware to varying degrees of the dangers of the agreement and its loose wording that made it reliant upon the "good intentions" of Israel and the US overseer of the process, it did not anticipate how Israel would interpret and implement the accords, nor how extensively the US would back this interpretation.

Even had they anticipated such an unfolding, the PLO had very little leverage to change the conditions on offer. The leadership's very survival and return from exile were seen as overriding these concerns and the best the movement could achieve under the circumstances.

This brief and general description of how some aspects of the accords came about sheds light on how the entire character of the negotiations between the parties resembled a situation whereby Israel was the party that held all power. Israel would *internally* determine what it would concede or not, rather than actually negotiate these matters with the Palestinians. In fact, former Israeli prime minister Shimon Peres is quoted in 1994 as saying "we are negotiating with ourselves"—because the Palestinians had zero leverage to influence this internal Israeli debate.[4]

It is worth appreciating that Israel and the US never wavered in their positions regarding their political rejection of Palestinian national rights, given their views that it strategically competed with the Zionist narrative and project, and was a part of the "radical Arab national" camp tied to an anti colonial, anti-imperial agenda. Such a position was essentially grandfathered in from Great Britain's mandate-era position, whereby an "Arab Palestine" was seen as creating Arab continuity between North Africa and Asia that would strengthen an already vibrant Arab nationalist bloc in the

Levant and beyond, across a crucial transitory corridor of world trade, and at Europe's doorstep.

While these roots partially explain Western support for the creation of Israel, Israel's establishment in 1948 and its expulsion of the majority of the indigenous population had already denied this possibility. Western and Israeli efforts have since focused on how to best manage the remaining Palestinian population still in historical Palestine post-1967, across the "newly" occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. Moreover, the population of the 1967 Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) had become increasingly rebellious during the 1987 Intifada, representing a long-term challenge to the principle of the "Jewish democratic state." Provision of citizenship to this community would destroy the "Jewish character" of Israel; denying citizenship, its "democratic character."[5]

The answer to this dilemma envisioned by the historically dominant political faction in Israel (the Labor Party), which led the Oslo process, entailed the endorsement of limited autonomy for Palestinians, at least in the near term and in the absence of conditions that would allow Israel to expel the Palestinians forthright. The Oslo process was precisely seen as the avenue for realizing this arrangement through the weakened PLO. Autonomy differed from sovereignty, as it retained Israeli power over the autonomous zones and created a scenario whereby Palestinian affairs could be managed indirectly through a leadership willing to administer autonomy. In other words, it was the logic of subcontracting and leveraging the autonomy leadership to address Israel's security, political, and economic goals, while allowing Israel's settlement impetus to continue beyond the autonomous areas. This would allow Israel to continue its long-standing policy of attempting to unite the conquests of 1948 with those of 1967, with no Israeli leadership in history ever having advocated a sovereign Palestinian state. Instead, autonomy allowed for Israel to nominally get the Palestinians off the Israeli "books," and if the Palestinians didn't like it, they could simply leave—or might be "encouraged" to do so.

It is important to recognize here that a contradiction nonetheless structures Israeli and US policy vis-à-vis the Palestinians: on the one hand, Israel and the US want the Palestinians off Israeli books, and out of their direct control—financially, demographically, security-wise, and so on. On the other hand, these powers are unwilling to let go of the Palestinians,

because doing so creates the basis for the nucleus of a national project and its organizing and strengthening. US, Israeli, and Western donor approaches to Palestine have thus constantly been structured by this tension of "separation and control." This has had repercussions for the nature of the entity created through the accords—the Palestinian Authority (PA)—and indeed upon its animating political force, the Fateh movement. It has meant that the PA has been shaped by contradictory forces that, on the one hand, are designed to provide a singular body to cater to Israeli subcontracted needs vis-à-vis the five hundred villages and cities of the West Bank and the two million people in Gaza. On the other hand, allowing this singular body to have too much power creates problems for Israel and the US, insofar as it serves as the basis of continued Palestinian national aspirations and organizing.

Fateh understands this and has sought to benefit from this contradiction, exploiting where possible efforts that allowed it to centralize power and resources, while not abandoning larger claims for Palestinian rights.

Overall, it should go without saying that the Oslo Accords were to be interpreted according to US and Israeli prerogatives and not according to international law or UN resolutions. Moreover, the accords themselves contained no forms of independent arbitrage within them through which Palestinians could petition for changes. The accords outlined that any disagreements between the parties were to be deferred to the US or a committee that Israel also had to agree to. This functionally created a self-referential system, where the Palestinians had no effective leverage to have their concerns independently adjudicated according to international legal norms. In this respect the entire process reproduced all the power asymmetries of the situation on the ground and around the negotiation table, with this pattern reproduced in all domains—"security," economically, civil affairs, water, and others.

All this took place beneath a deliberately constructed mythology built around the Oslo process, which attempted to characterize it as a bona fide peace process, entailing performative handshakes on the White House lawn and the provision of Nobel Peace Prizes to Peres, Rabin, and Arafat.

Structuring the process behind these great mythologies was important for blurring the reality of what was actually taking place before the eyes of the international community, while enabling Israel to pocket Palestinian

political and institutional concessions from the beginning. Namely, while the Palestinians were forced to accept an arrangement whereby their national claims could in theory be addressed in "final status negotiations"—five years after the accords were signed (though in practice it was seven years later) and without guarantees this would take place according to their legal rights—Israel, in contrast, pocketed PLO recognition (and all that meant in terms of "security"). This was an autonomy scenario that saw the creation of a Palestinian authority with delimited self-governing powers, with no imperative to turn this into anything greater; and, just as important, it saw the end of the international boycott of Israel, which at the time was much more powerful than the BDS movement today. Consider, for instance, that the PLO had more international recognition than Israel before the peace process. This effectively ended with the accords, allowing Israel to integrate into world capital—something Israeli capital formations sought highly, so as to access markets in India, China, and beyond.

Israel thus pocketed all these important economic, political, and "security" achievements, and the Palestinians were left hanging on to a process that was toothless to realize their national liberation aspirations. In fact, it was designed to abort them. The "separation and control" model that Israel was able to achieve through Oslo effectively lay the cornerstone of implementing apartheid, though the world powers characterized this as a step toward "peace."

Lock-in: The role of Western aid

The above reading of the Oslo process establishes its de facto drivers and aims, and the context that structures the Palestinian people and leadership's predicament up until the present.

Once Israel had ensured its main achievements through Oslo, the history of political developments can essentially be read as a history of Israel's attempting to lock this arrangement into place on the ground (institutionally, politically and economically, and "security-wise"), with Western donor support, while eliminating residual pockets of resistance to these endeavors generated by Palestinian nationalism, or even simply Palestinians' efforts to remain on their land.

Israel, with Western donor states in tow, would essentially act from a perverse interest to freeze the process overall, as none of these powers were

interested in realizing rights to statehood, refugee return, or the package of Palestinian rights associated with national self-determination.

Western donors turned a blind eye to Israel's continued settlement construction during the interim period and failed to uphold any international principles related to the rights of populations under occupation. Instead, they used aid to entice Palestinians into accepting the arrangement beneath a broad neoliberal peace-building paradigm. Large development projects written into the Declaration of Principles were marketed as profitable business opportunities for senior PLO and Fateh officials, tying them financially to the flawed political process. This class came to quickly dominate the main economic opportunities created by the peace process overall, given the privileging of the private sector within the neoliberal paradigm and the latter's proximity to PA bureaucrats, Western donors, and Israeli political and security negotiators. These arrangements served to create new political-business and security elites who were institutionally and materially tied to the status quo and who opposed destabilization of the situation.

Western donor aid would also be used to neutralize significant sections of Palestinian leftist political opposition through the support of NGOs. The latter served to "professionalize" their previous community work and service provision in "above ground," transparent, audited activity that made these entities accountable to donors and not to their bases. It also entangled them in political parameters and financial arrangements that further removed them from political party activism and mobilization.

The Israeli dimension

While donors tasked themselves with the role of "getting the Palestinian economy up and running," together with the governance apparatus to administer this (read: to establish the civil and security bureaucracy to administer autonomy, and particularly its most costly civil-service provision elements—health and education), Israel began implementing its interpretation of the principle of separation and control. It came in the form of the "closure" and checkpoint policy around Palestinian localities, allowing for Israel to control access to and from PA-administered areas, while utilizing a security pretext. Israel's control of the Palestinian economy was thus strengthened, as the Orwellian division of the 1967 OPT would

fracture the integrity of these terrains and enable Israel to continue building settlements in between.

Israel's implementation of closure behind a security pretext (while also freezing negotiations) was justified on the backdrop of the Palestinian suicide-bombing campaigns of the mid-1990s. But this was disingenuous, as an equal argument could have been made by the Palestinians who were dying in far larger numbers at the hands of the Israeli army and settlers. Moreover, Israel dramatically escalated tensions during sensitive moments of the peace process, assassinating top Palestinian political and grassroot figures, including some from Fateh. These moves sent clear messages that Israel intended to do what it wanted on the ground irrespective of the accords and the nominal "peace" it pursued.

When some Palestinian factions responded to these provocations and attacks, it allowed Israel to put the brakes on the process overall, under the guise of security, and with Western states backing them in this freeze. This, of course, generated even more explosive conditions on the Palestinian side, because these acts paralyzed the Palestinian economy, while reinforcing preexisting factional and elite doubts regarding the extent to which Oslo was a trap. Alternatively, Israel used the security pretext to pursue scenarios whereby it argued it needed to negotiate new agreements to implement already existing agreements—essentially further baiting and switching the Palestinians. The political return for Palestinians engaging in the process was decreasing, while Israeli leverage over the Palestinians was increasing.

When things finally came to a head in the summer of 2000 at the Camp David summit, Arafat was effectively put before a fait accompli by Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak and US president Bill Clinton. The latter pressured Arafat to accept the parameters of a final solution that negated all the main Palestinian demands—rejecting sovereign statehood, refugee return, Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, and decolonization of Jewish settlements across the 1967 OPT. When the Palestinian leadership rejected this, Israel and the US effectively reverted to their pre-Oslo position vis-á-vis the Palestinian leadership, boxing it in and smearing is as "not a partner to peace."

The Israeli Labor government in power then allowed one of Israel's greatest war criminals (Ariel Sharon) to enter the al-Aqsa Mosque compound.[6] This major provocation (which itself demonstrates *cross-*

Zionist collusion on these matters) led to the killing of seven protesters after hundreds of army and police personnel surrounded the compound after Friday prayers the following day, and ignitied the Second "al-Aqsa" Intifada, in September 2000.

Once the powder keg had ignited, the predictable explosion would provide Israel and donors the basis to lock in the Oslo apartheid straightjacket regime. Behind an "anti-terror" discourse, the pretense of negotiating political matters with the Palestinians was altogether removed, while the fragmenting, isolating, and destroying of recalcitrant nationalist elements within the occupied West Bank and Gaza and its leadership would begin.

Here it is worthwhile to note the cunning of what took place when seen in historical perspective: under the guise of a peace process, Israel and the Western donor community, led by the US, enabled Arafat to build the PA under extremely politically sensitive conditions for the Palestinians, based upon vague notions that it could lead to the achievement of Palestinian rights. In his weakness, Arafat accepted, even though the principle of "self-governance under occupation" had been rejected by the PLO since the 1970s and was seen as treasonous. For many Palestinians, Arafat's leadership, presence, and legitimacy served to insulate the process from fears that the process would lead to conceding on Palestinian rights and the PA transforming into a collaborator government. However, once Arafat rejected the political diktats of Camp David, Israel and Western donors no longer considered him a "partner to peace," and he became an "accomplice to terror." Moreover, Israel used the Second Intifada to militarily eradicate any institutional, political, or military resistance to these aims—on the popular level and within the PLO, as well as within the leadership, including ultimately Arafat himself.

This is where a second wave of neoliberally inspired economic policies would emerge in the interventions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in the Palestinian theatre. In the early period—1993 to 2000—donors funneled billions of dollars to the PA through "on budget" and "off budget" channels, so that Arafat could build momentum around the peace process mythology and "buy in" sufficient sectors of the population, particularly local Fateh activists. He needed this money to carry out the controversial task of constructing an authority under such sensitive conditions. Once Israel reverted to framing him as an enemy, however,

donors stopped funding him and the World Bank and the IMF came to accuse Arafat of corruption and lack of “good governance.” In truth, it was the donors themselves who actually facilitated the “corruption,” because it was they who facilitated off-budget accounting and “buy-in.” The international financial institutions however would employ the neoliberal “good governance” template to accuse the failure of Oslo on the corruption and nepotism of the PA, which they themselves empowered. This enabled these actors to isolate Arafat and restructure the PA in a manner that would disempower the executive and expose all PLO and PA investments, revealing the movement’s true state of financial dependency.

Donors thereafter treated Arafat as politically expedient and he would be killed—first, politically, as “not a partner of peace”; then institutionally, by the World Bank and IMF: and finally, corporeally—making his return to political relevance impossible. While the latter is still shrouded in mystery, focusing on his actual death overlooks the significance of the elimination of Arafat historically, politically, and institutionally. Death through assassination simply ensured that this was permanent.

The bludgeoning of the Palestinian movement and leadership during the Second Intifada is rarely recalled by commentators because it is superficially compared with its better organized predecessor, while being maligned for its messy, tit-for-tat “cycle of violence” nature. Instead it should be regarded as a mass popular uprising by the Palestinian people and its institutions to stand up to the Oslo apartheid arrangement that Israel and donors were functionally attempting to lock into place.

Israel’s scorched-earth campaigns would result in roughly six thousand Palestinian deaths, fifty thousand injuries, eleven thousand prisoners, and countless others who left the country seeking a more stable life elsewhere. All this was done by a nuclear power to a population that was essentially defenseless, with no army and no real weapons, and that could not even move a box of tomatoes from one town to another without Israeli permission.

The post-Arafat era

While Israel’s military superiority was unquestioned, translating this superiority into political victory has nonetheless proven far more elusive.

The US believed that political victory lay in hosting democratic elections to usher in a more pragmatic, obedient PA leadership under Arafat's successor, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), and within the IMF-reformed PA bureaucracy. CIA intelligence assessments and US discussions with Palestinian security officials gave a false sense of security that Fateh and Abu Mazen would have no problems rising to power and would be compliant servants when they did.

But the US woefully miscalculated, resulting in an overwhelming victory to Hamas—Fateh's arch-rival and staunch opponent of the Oslo process. The US would further miscalculate in its reaction, maintaining that Hamas needed to be countered at all costs, and, if possible, overthrown. The US thereafter aligned itself with the most corrupt and opportunistic military elements of Fateh to try to organize a coup against Hamas, to prevent it from taking over any of the ministries it was entitled to take over after winning elections. Hamas, which was more adept, organized, and in tune with the Palestinian street at the time (thanks to anarchy within post-Arafat Fateh ranks), suspected what was going on, repelled the coup, and killed or expelled the Fateh renegades who were behind it from Gaza.

The resulting division between a Fateh-controlled West Bank and a Hamas-administered Gaza Strip would come to define the contradictory Palestinian context that persists to this day.

Hamas's appeal lay in its promise to implement a wide series of democratic civil governance reforms to the PA while realigning the Palestinian political agenda. The latter included acknowledging that the Palestinians were still in a phase of "national liberation" and had "the right to strive to recover their own rights and end the occupation using all means, including armed struggle."[7] This agenda resonated with Palestinian society in a context of heavy disappointment with the structure and outcomes of the Oslo process (which had never been put to a national referendum); the disappointing performance of the Fateh-led PA during the 1990s; and the devastation wrought on Palestinian society in the wake of Israeli repression during the Second Intifada. Furthermore, after the failed 2007 US-backed coup attempt and the full-blown siege of the territory by Israel and the international community, the hypocrisy and transparency of the Oslo process was laid bare.

Palestinians were now caught in an Israeli/Western donor state–imposed straitjacket, where neither of their leaderships could exercise any genuine policy space. Each became the subject of colonial manipulation efforts to leverage the Palestinian movement. Gaza—the seat of the new reformist tendency—would receive the stick to the West Bank's cynical "carrot," as the Fateh leadership suddenly became awash with new streams of financial aid. Overall, however, both political projects would be contained and controlled through the combination of aid and military might, disempowering a collective Palestinian political positioning.

Gaza, in particular, would suffer the burden of horrific military assaults combined with siege tactics, in an effort to generate humanitarian, political, and financial crises that could "tame" Hamas, scuttling its ability to perform its political and reformist mandate.

As it had done with Fateh previously, Israel sought to force Hamas to internalize compromises generated through the management of the crises of governance under impossible conditions of siege. Israel thus worked to divide the Palestinian front, splitting it between its Gaza and West Bank wings, ensuring that each individual territory was governed by Oslo or Oslo-like arrangements. Israel and donors thereby became the overseers of an indirect governance arrangement of Palestinian affairs, leveraged and managed through the self-preservation instincts of each of the two main political parties of Palestinian politics today (Fateh and Hamas). International donor aid subsidizes this arrangement at no cost to Israel, with Western funds used in the case of the West Bank, and Qatari/Turkish/Islamist funds, plus residual Western aid (through UN bodies and NGOs), subsidizing Gaza. Each polity subsequently responds to these pressures by erecting its own set of elites, having less tolerance for internal democracy, and manipulating and controlling what exists of its economic opportunities in the service of its self-proclaimed guardianship model of Palestinian liberation.

Through these means, Israel and donors effectively divide and rule the Palestinian polity and people, hamstringing its ability to form a collective position and its periphery. Israel is seemingly absolved from the responsibility to politically engage with the Palestinians in negotiations, thus freeing it to accelerate its settlement project without restraint.

Concluding thoughts

This overarching framework generally describes the conditions within which the historical national movement of the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip and the PLO operate. Of course, it says little of the political leadership and conditions of Palestinians inside Jerusalem or communities in 1948 Palestine (Palestinian citizens of Israel), whose particularities, though significant, are not addressed herein due to space considerations and the fact that they do not lead the historic national movement. Their individual struggles are nonetheless important, as the struggle takes place on different fronts, including across the regional and western diaspora.

In this light, it is worth recognizing that Israel has different interests in different parts of historical Palestine and implements different strategies accordingly to realize its goals. Palestinian political actors and mobilizations take on various forms as a result of these dynamics, making it difficult to generalize a common type of struggle, given that the means of oppression and control differ from locality to locality, and together with it, its resistance.

Bearing this in mind, it is the Gaza Strip that is the most intense of the theatres, because it is the least important for Zionist aspirations. Gaza is the territory that Rabin—the Nobel Peace Prize winner—wished would "sink into the sea." However, the West Bank differs insofar as Israel maintains key strategic interests there given the territory's far greater landmass, strategic high grounds, water reserves, and historically relevant sites for the Zionist movement's narrative and mythology of "returning the Jewish people to the land of Israel."

This ultimately explains why Israel chose to unilaterally disengage from the Gaza Strip in 2005, removing its twenty-one settlements there, while investing energies in massive colony construction projects across the West Bank—tripling the number of settlers since 1993. Israel ultimately aims to annex these territories after all, finally uniting the conquests of 1948 Palestine with those of 1967, and ideally without a significant Palestinian presence.

The discrepancy between Israeli and international approaches concerning Gaza and the West Bank—together with the recurrent military conflagrations in Gaza—should not deceive observers into believing that the West Bank has been pacified. Particularly in light of decreased donor

aid following the 2010 Arab uprisings, and with the uncertainty generated around Abu Mazen's eventual succession, the political situation in the West Bank remains extremely unstable. One must not forget that the West Bank is much larger territorially and in regards to population and is more difficult to organize given direct Israeli presence on the ground, daily entering the hearts of Palestinian cities and towns to conduct arrest campaigns. This does not happen in the Gaza Strip, which also helps resistance experience to accumulate and leadership to develop.

Israel currently holds around seven thousand Palestinian prisoners, with the overwhelming majority of these representing the political leadership of the West Bank. If these persons were free to organize, the West Bank context would certainly look different. Israel well understands this, which is why it doesn't rely upon the PA to arrest these persons—Israel does it.

On top of this is the dynamic of Fateh, and in particular the majority branch of the party loyal to Abu Mazen, nominally in control of Palestinian governance functions in the West Bank. These actors see the West Bank as their last stronghold. Fateh is not interested in popular mobilizations that could threaten its hold on power and displace its claim as "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian struggle." It is interested in maintenance of the status quo and demobilization. As far as Fateh is concerned, the Palestinian movement has tapped the gains of armed resistance (winning partial state recognition) and should now use current conditions to invest in its presence in the areas it was able to root itself in through Oslo, while avoiding a damaging frontal confrontation with Israel. Fateh believes this quietist approach will ultimately defeat Zionist ambitions, based on the notion that as long as Palestinians survive and remain in Palestine, organized as self-identifying Palestinians, they will remain present as " the non-Jews" within the " Jewish democratic state," de facto annulling this central Zionist tenet. Fateh believes this contradiction will eventually force statehood or the collapse of Zionism.

Thus, a debilitating, divided internal situation prevails across the Palestinian political sphere and within the West Bank in particular, where factional unity cannot be achieved on the ground, and with the Israeli occupation army doing its part to ensure that none of the Palestinian actors in the West Bank—including Fateh—gain much traction.

Alternatively, in Gaza we see the opposite: all factions—including most Fateh branches there, together with the left—are increasingly unified. There are even joint operations rooms and the exchange of military expertise and equipment. But this is hardly possible in the West Bank, where the Abu Mazen faction of Fateh dominates and will not allow alternative strategies and actors to gain momentum and potentially displace it and its strategy. We also must acknowledge that Abu Mazen and Fateh still have a fairly broad political and social constituency, with about 17 percent of employed persons working in the PA in the West Bank (with wages higher than the private sector) and a public sector driving at least 40 percent of consumer demand. The PA is the main economic player in the West Bank, and there are few opportunities besides it: work in Israeli settlements or the weak private sector, which struggles in a race to the bottom in "mom and pop" shops that barely get by. Israel's broader "de-development" policies can be thanked for this as well.

The point here is to emphasize that in the post-Oslo world, the main clusters of Palestinian communities in historical Palestine, from the river to the sea—those in the West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem, and Palestinian communities in Israel—all interact and experience Zionist settler colonialism differently, particular to the historical and local evolution of conflict dynamics and Israel's specific interests in each locale, together with other factors. While the Oslo process did indeed do grave damage to the Palestinian movement overall, it did not succeed in "killing" it. What it did do was fragment it and develop sophisticated means of controlling it, which in turn transformed the way the conflict was experienced collectively, and subsequently the relation of the Palestinian movement to itself and to its oppressor. The resulting diversification of national expression that emerged regionally and institutionally remains a process in flux, but it is not all negative.

As these dynamics evolve on the ground, the role of diasporic activism in the Western theater will increase. In the US in particular, Palestinian solidarity movement actors need to be aware and informed of these broad dynamics to situate themselves and efficiently manage their resources and priorities. Today, Trump's demagoguery and the very public association of his tenure with Israel set the stage for more organically integrating the question of Palestine within the vocabulary and actions of the broad

progressive countercurrents opposed to his agenda, and for slowly making moves to gain traction against it.

Moreover, we must be aware that the US and Israel have also largely exhausted the traditional "carrot and stick" toolbox used to such effect against the Palestinians since the Oslo process began. Though these techniques have certainly chalked up important advantages in managing their "Palestinian problem," the victory is pyrrhic insofar as these methods have not been able to fundamentally alter or defeat Palestinian aspirations for national self-determination. The result is the diversification of Palestinian national activity and expression, politically, institutionally, and territorially. Palestinian national resiliency now manifests itself in resurgent ways across Palestine's fragmented landscape. While this poses coordination and communication problems, it nonetheless creates conditions to imagine the formulation of a genuine post-Oslo politics and movement emerging, locally, regionally, and internationally, unbeholden to the cynical buzzwords around "peace" and "state-building" that derailed the movement and its supporters for the past quarter century. Moreover, especially after the launch of the popular movement of the Great March of Return in Gaza in March 2018, a defiant political movement is emerging that is influencing and will continue to influence the other theaters of conflict, doing so in dialectical fashion, according to its own time frame and according to the particular local structure and articulation of power therein.

As these dynamics play out, it is incumbent upon progressive political actors in the West to inform themselves of the new and evolving dynamics of Palestinian politics and to find ways to integrate it into their politics and action. Because Palestinian oppression is directly subsidized by Western military, diplomatic, and financial support, a clear conflict can be targeted between the interests of average taxpayers, and the interests of US imperialism and their Zionist sympathizers/facilitators. The case can indeed be strengthened when one considers the central role Israel has played in the post-9/11 world, fashioning itself as one of the chief research and development facilities of technologies of control, surveillance, and repression globally—from the Mexican–US frontier to the scandals of the Israeli private intelligence corporation Black Cube. Moreover, the fact that revisionist Zionism under Netanyahu has precisely sought to capitalize on global right-wing populist trends, and has abandoned the pretense of representing liberal Jews and their concerns, means that important

cleavages have been more clearly exposed and can now be widened. These contradictions must be exploited as part of a broader strategy of building left political forces that can pose an alternative to the slippery slope of fascism that world politics seems to be sliding down. The fate of Palestine, and a great many other causes of global concern—and survival—appear to hang in the balance.



6

Palestine in Tahrir

Jehad Abusalim

"In everything, Ahmad found his opposite
For twenty years he was asking
For twenty years he was wandering
For twenty years, and for moments only, his mother gave him birth
In a vessel of banana leaves
And departed
He seeks an identity and is struck by the volcano
The clouds are gone and have left me homeless, and
The mountains have flung their mantles and concealed me
I am Ahmad the Arab, he said
I am the bullets, the oranges and the memory."

—*Mahmoud Darwish*

It has been almost a decade since the first wave of uprisings erupted in a number of Arab countries. Although the uprisings differed in their trajectories, ends, and results, it is hard to think about their demands as

radically different from each other. After all, the slogan "bread, freedom, and social justice" was the common denominator among all slogans of the Arab revolutions. As the Arab Spring unfolded, many observers and participants began to raise the question of "Palestine and the Arab uprisings," an inquiry that took various forms. Some wondered whether the uprisings would affect the Palestinian struggle, either positively or negatively, and some posed the question as to whether the fever of the "spring" would reach Palestine, triggering a "Palestinian Spring."[1] There are fundamental problems with this thinking. First, it assumes, whether maliciously or in good faith, that Palestine is somehow separate from the rest of the region's issues and concerns. Second, it projects a certain understanding of a revolutionary moment of mass mobilization that ignores what's unique about the Palestinian case; Palestinians aren't resisting their own "rulers" alone but additional layers of oppression: settler colonialism and occupation. As Wendy Pearlman wrote, "If any nation in the region had a tradition of people's power, it was the Palestinians."[2]

This "complex and multilayered systems of control and oppression"[3] that Palestinians are subject to includes the settler-colonial Israeli state and its imperial allies, the Palestinian Authority, certain Arab regimes, and patriarchy in political and social spheres. Yet, against the odds of political fragmentation, blockade, and Israeli aggression, moments and movements of mass popular mobilization still take place inside and outside Palestine. Palestinians still express dissidence and defiance vis-á-vis "their occupier, Israel, their own governments [in the West Bank and Gaza], or oppressive Arab regimes."[4] Nonetheless, observers note that Palestinians have never faced *more* constraints hindering their ability to organize and mobilize than what they've come up against in the last decade or so.[5] But moments such as the Hirak [popular uprising] in 2011, the Jerusalem uprising in 2017, and the Great March of Return show that Palestinians continue to mobilize, inspired by other movements in the region and continuing a century-long legacy of Palestinian mass mobilization against oppression.[6]

Therefore, movements of mass mobilization in Palestine and the region inspire each other. Instead of reading the Arab uprisings and the Palestinian cause as two separate issues, both struggles should be read as events happening in a broader Arab region, home to diverse ethnic, religious, and

cultural groups. While I acknowledge that modern-day national boundaries have been solidified and that particular identities have taken shape within the boundaries of each Arab state, it is imperative to emphasize that, despite these developments, Arabs and other ethnic groups native to the region from Iraq to Mauritania are politically invested not only in the issues of the specific national territory where they reside but also in issues concerning the region as a whole. An uprising in Tunisia was able to trigger another in Egypt, then in Libya, Bahrain, and Syria. Recently, a second wave of protests and mass mobilization engulfed the region, from Sudan, Algeria, Lebanon, and Iraq, restoring confidence, challenging sectarianism and corruption, and reviving the demands of the first wave of uprisings. Therefore, while national boundaries exist with established local identities within them, the level of transnational Arab interest in different issues across these boundaries is unique. Despite national boundaries and the lack of any vision for geographic unity between Arabs in the near future, Arab people still view themselves as "a nation."[7]

According to the 2015 Arab Opinion Index, a public opinion survey based on the findings from face-to-face interviews conducted with 18,311 respondents in 12 separate Arab countries, 79 percent of respondents support the notion of Arab unity. The same public opinion survey was conducted in 2017 and 2018, with 77 percent of a similar number of respondents "support[ing] the sentiment that the various Arab peoples constitute a single nation."[8] These results also show that "three-quarters of the population of the Arab world agrees that the Palestinian cause concerns all Arabs, and not the Palestinians alone."[9] Establishing this understanding is key to any discussion of Palestine and the Arab uprisings and Palestinian views of the uprisings. Such perceptions by Arabs of Palestine, or vice versa, before and after the uprisings are rooted in these broad sentiments shared by Arabs across national boundaries.

Arabs participate in politics in two spaces: a *qutri* (local) level within each country, and a *qawmi* (pan-Arab) level. The majority of Arabs have been excluded from political participation on both levels, and therefore efforts by organizers and activists to create spaces for political expression to address issues on one level create opening for mobilization on another level. For example, during the lead-up to the Egyptian revolution, waves of popular protest erupted in response to the Second Intifada and the invasion

of Iraq. These protest moments in Egypt over Arab issues gave Egyptian organizers and activists opportunities to build momentum toward the uprising in 2011.[10]

An Arab Spring is a Palestinian Spring

Many decades before the Arab Spring, in 1972, the late Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani wrote a very important pamphlet entitled *The 1936–39 Revolt in Palestine.* While Kanafani is well-known for his activism and literary work, his political and historical scholarship are no less important. They not only reflect Kanafani's complex reading of the Palestinian plight, but they also offer a framework that helps make sense of the different variables that affect the Palestinian situation. This framework appears in the very first paragraph of his study of the Great Revolt:

> Between 1936 and 1939, the Palestinian revolutionary movement suffered a severe setback at the hands of three separate enemies that were to constitute together the principal threat to the nationalist movement in Palestine in all subsequent stages of its struggle: the local reactionary leadership; the regimes in the Arab states surrounding Palestine; and the imperialist-Zionist enemy.

For Kanafani, it is important to understand "the structures" of the above-mentioned three "separate" forces and "the dialectical relations that existed between them." Indeed, if one is to capture the Palestinian predicament in a single concept, the most salient would be the idea of a trap laid by these three forces, which have combined to stifle the Palestinian liberation struggle. According to Kanafani, during the 1936–39 Arab uprising in Palestine "the Pan-Arab mass movement was serving as a catalyst for the revolutionary spirit of the Palestinian masses," but at the same time "the established regimes in these Arab countries were doing everything in their power to help curb and undermine the Palestinian mass movement." In other words, Palestinian revolutionary spirit was inspired by mass movements happening in the region, yet from the standpoint of the ruling classes of these countries, especially those surrounding Palestine itself, the Palestinian struggle was viewed as a threat to the stability of their rule, a rule reinforced by the very same colonial powers Palestinians were resisting. To challenge the hegemony of the established powers in the

nascent Arab states risked "creating a revolutionary potential that their respective ruling classes could not afford to overlook."[11]

While Kanafani did not equate the three counterrevolutionary forces in Palestine in the intensity of their effects on the Palestinian people—acknowledging the primary responsibility of the settler-colonial power—he nonetheless did not avoid identifying the "local reactionary leadership, the regimes in the Arab states surrounding Palestine, and the Imperialist-Zionist enemy" as part of one overall structure. The three forces need each other to survive, even if they show antagonistic attitudes toward each other. Israel was established in a context in which basically the entire Arab world was crushed by the burdens of colonialism. And although some Arab nations received their partial independence by the late 1940s, their ability to help Palestinians who were about to face large-scale ethnic cleansing was very limited. Kanafani's framework is necessary to grasp the trajectory of the history of Palestinian struggle, its moments of triumph and defeat. Based on Kanafani's analysis, Palestinian liberation and self-determination can only be realized if all three forces are challenged simultaneously. Although they are "separate," they rely on and condition one another, and their existence has proven to be similarly detrimental to the Palestinian national cause.

The importance of the Arab dimension

It would be foolish to ever assume that any form of Palestinian liberation can be achieved without complete Arab liberation and independence. After all, the presence of Israel in its current shape and form, with its present politics and role, has not only been detrimental to Palestinian self-determination and liberation, but it has also had negative effects on the entire region. The establishment of Israel created a never-ending rupture in the heart of the region—it disrupted its geographical contiguity and curtailed any possibility for the creation of a broader form of sustainable unity within the broader region. After all, Israel continues to occupy not only Palestine but also parts of Lebanon (Shebaa Farms) and the Golan Heights.

Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan continue to host Palestinian refugees expelled by Israel in 1948. These three Arab countries, in addition to countries like Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, Tunisia, and Sudan, played a major role directly and indirectly in the history of the Palestinian national movement

with both positive and negative results. This was done through building alliances with certain Palestinian factions and opening their lands for Palestinian factions to establish bases or seek refuge. Other Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait provided various forms of material and financial support to the Palestinians. Kuwait, for example, was once home to one of the region's most thriving Palestinian communities. Therefore, it would be an understatement to say that the context of the region as a whole is key to the process of Palestinian liberation and self-determination. Without strong official and popular Arab support, Palestinians will continue to find themselves powerless and unable to sustain any successes made in the struggle for freedom.

Palestine and the Arab Question

Ten years of upheaval in the Arab world have revealed many things about the region, its peoples, states, and governments. The events of the last decade have shown that there is in fact a common set of problems facing the Arab world, which allows us to speak of the region and peoples in terms of "the Arab Question." The Arab Question is defined by a variety of interrelated issues or conditions facing the Arab people: issues of authoritarianism, development, citizenship, and sectarianism; the legacy of colonialism, the nature of the state, and the relationship between states and citizens; social and economic justice, access to resources, social rights and freedoms, and ethnic and religious minority rights; and the conflict with Israel and the destructive impact of foreign military and political interventions. These are all part of one matrix that determines the experiences of the majority of the people of the Arab world. Decades after Kanafani's work, Palestinian intellectual Azmi Bishara has revolutionized the study of the Arab Question. The term "question," which can be used interchangeably with "problem," might not have a positive connotation in the minds of many. After all, for a long time, European and Western imperialisms have only evoked the terms "question" or "problem" as part of furthering external colonial and imperialist projects, as was the case with the "the Oriental question," with regards to the fate of the Ottoman Empire, or in furthering internal colonialism and oppression within Europe, as was the case with the "Jewish question."

But the discussion on the Arab Question in present times is different. Although Kanafani did not use the term “Arab Question,” his argument centered the Arab dimension as it related to the question of Palestinian liberation. Bishara’s work on Palestine and the Arab Question resituates the Palestinian cause in its Arab dimension. It is important to reiterate that speaking of an Arab dimension when it comes to discussing Palestine doesn’t take for granted the narrow notion that there is “only one Arab nation,” void of difference, richness, disagreement, or even different visions and ideas about sub-identities, world views, and so on. Samir Amin (who regrettably became an ardent supporter of Egypt’s Sisi) warns against this depiction of the region in such terms. For Amin, “the national reality of the Arab people is expressed in terms of the overlapping stages of a pyramid. The Pan-Arab dimension (*Qawmi*) is a reality. But the ‘local’ dimensions (*Qutri*) are no less a reality.”[12]

In the post-colonial and decolonization era, Arab states and intellectuals did not tend to separate the *Qutri* from the *Qawmi*. For them, an understanding of the complex relationship between overall Arab liberation within the broader Pan-Arab (*Qawmi*) dimension was not mutually exclusive with a focus on local issues and concerns. It wasn’t until Egypt’s Sadat surprised the Arab world with the peace deal with Israel, breaking away from the Arab consensus, backed by “intellectuals” who argued that the state of war with Israel drained state resources, and the only path forward was to pursue peace agreements with Israel. Although peace is a positive word, in the context of peace dealings between Arab states, the PLO, and Israel, the term “peace” has become synonymous with the US-sponsored “peace process” that guarantees Israeli military superiority and denies Palestinians even minimal forms of self-determination. Intellectuals who supported Camp David, siding with their authoritarian leadership and citing the need to end the involvement of their countries in larger struggles in the region, sought to depart from the idea that Arab issues and causes across the region were interconnected. Supporters of the Camp David Accords, which were perceived negatively by Arabs in general and by Palestinians in particular, were ostracized in the Arab world. Their response was to push the line that paying attention to overall Arab issues would be against the interests of the local nation.

At the same time, from the 1970s onward, there also existed another cynical approach by Arab states vis-á-vis the Palestinian issue. Unlike the Sadat regime, the Iraqi, Syrian, and Libyan regimes continued to express support for the Palestinian national movement but intervened cynically and divisively to dominate the movement's internal politics. Pitting factions against one another, and abusing the fact that Palestinians and their national movement lacked the resources and capacity to support themselves, the Arab regimes approached the Palestinian cause as an instrument of their own regional ambitions. Both of these approaches to Palestine—abandonment of the national cause and rapprochement with Israel on the one hand, and cynical exploitation of the Palestinian movement on the other—have defined the Palestinians' relationship to Arab regimes from the '70s onward. The existence of these two main approaches within the Arab dimension, the conflict and contradiction between them, rendered the Palestinians weaker than ever in their struggle against the Zionist project and the Israeli state.

2011 and the end of the status quo

An "Israeli-inspired regional status quo" is the term academic Yaniv Voller used to describe the regional state of affairs prior to the Arab Spring. "With the overthrow of the Mubarak regime, Israel has now lost a leader who shared with it a desire for maintaining the 'stable' status quo," Voller wrote in 2012. In a policy paper published by the World Bank, Nadia Belhaj Hassine explains that "deteriorating standards of living, high and rising unemployment, and growing perceptions of exclusion" were factors that pushed Arabs to revolt in 2011. The combination of these factors cannot possibly describe a situation as stable, unless stable here means the silencing of popular demands for the sake of prioritizing Israel's interests.[13] Stability, from Israel's perspective, means the domestication of the region while it continues its settler-colonial expansion on Palestinian and Arab lands without facing any form of resistance or accountability. A major instrument for maintaining the status quo was the peace agreements signed between Arab states, the PLO, and Israel—agreements that were possible only because of the influence of the presence of elites and leaderships that benefit from such agreements against the interests and wishes of the people they claim to rule in their name.

For the Israeli political and security establishment, the terms "Arab Spring" and "uncertainty" became almost interchangeable. While Tunisian and Egyptian masses were on the streets calling for "bread, freedom, and social justice" and demanding their presidents to "dégage" (get out),[14] the prime minister of the "only democracy in the Middle East" stated that the Arab world was engulfed by an "Islamic, anti-western, anti-liberal, anti-Israel, undemocratic wave."[15] How is it that "the only democracy in the Middle East," with its political leadership and intellectual class, can speak of uncertainty and impending doom, when its neighbors ask for exactly what Israel claims to stand for—a thriving and representative political system where leadership can be held accountable if they deviate from maintaining the interests of their nations? For years, Western intellectuals and policy makers spoke of lack of Arab readiness for democracy; chiefly among them of course was Bernard Lewis, who, in response to the Arab uprisings' call for democratic reforms stated that Arabs "are simply not ready for free and fair elections."[16] He added that "in genuinely fair and free elections, [the Muslim parties] are very likely to win and I think that would be a disaster."[17]

Other commentators and writers in the West shared Lewis's grim vision of how things will unfold as a result of the uprisings. David Ignatius, a *Washington Post* columnist, wrote in July 2012 that the Arab Spring was "Israel's problem."[18] Ignatius cited Netanyahu's fear that the election of Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood would lead to "an erosion of the relationship with Egypt over time." Yet the détente between Egypt and Israel has never been about temporary changes in leadership, reflecting instead a deeper alignment between the political and economic establishments of both countries. This discourse, which makes the Arab fight for democracy, rights, and freedoms secondary to Israel's security concerns, shows the extent to which certain calls in the West for democracy in the Arab world are disingenuous.

The Gaza test

In Voller's article and in Ignatius's op-ed, Gaza is framed as the test for what Israeli–Egyptian relations would look like in a post-Mubarak Egypt.

In Voller's description of the "Israeli-inspired status quo," the Mubarak regime maintained stability by accepting, "if grudgingly, Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip."[19] The blockade on Gaza is part of a longstanding Israeli policy of isolating and de-developing a region that is 1 percent of the total area of Mandatory Palestine (the land granted by the British Mandate), yet is home to 2.2 million people, half of whom are children, and 70 percent of whom are refugees from territories on which the state of Israel stands today. Since 2007, Israel has imposed a choking blockade on Gaza, rendering it uninhabitable according to the United Nations. Under Mubarak's leadership, Egyptian authorities tightened the Rafah Crossing, the only land crossing between Palestine and Egypt, and Palestinians' only way in and out of the Strip through Egypt. Mubarak's complicity in the isolation of Gaza was perceived negatively by Egyptians and by people across the Arab world. Since Gaza is still an occupied territory according to international law, Israel, as an occupying power, "has an obligation to facilitate the freedom of movement of persons residing in the Occupied Palestinian Territory."[20] Upon Israel's unilateral disengagement from Gaza in 2005, Israel pressured Palestinian officials to declare that Israel had fully ceased its control over Gaza and that the Strip's current boundaries were final, but the Palestinian leadership refused.[21]

As Israel was unilaterally "withdrawing" from Gaza, it unleashed a process of isolation of the area in order to separate it from the rest of Palestine—a process that would be exacerbated a year later with Hamas's 2006 electoral victory. French scholar Jean-Pierre Filiu termed this as Israel's "ninth war" on Gaza, as part of his article "The Twelve Wars on Gaza." This process started by dismantling the Erez Industrial Zone, where "thousands of Palestinian employees were summarily laid off," and reducing the Palestinian fishing zone from twenty to only nine nautical miles off the coast of Gaza.[22] Prior to Israel's unilateral disengagement, Israel maintained a military presence at the Rafah Crossing, which meant that it assumed full control of how Palestinians moved across that border. Palestinians unable to cross from Gaza to Israel to travel to the outside world, visit their relatives, or access education and medical treatment were also confronted by Israel's control of Gaza's only land-crossing with Egypt. As Israel redeployed its forces from Gaza in 2005, Palestinians hoped that

traveling through Rafah would relieve them of the burdens of dealing with Israel's security regime.

In 2005, the Palestinian Authority and Israel reached an "Agreement on Movement and Access," facilitated by the US and the European Union. As part of the agreement, the Rafah Crossing would open with the presence of a third party on site. The agreement stated that the crossing would notify the Israeli government of the passage of travelers, with Israel reserving a right to object to the passage of specific individuals. Yet this agreement, with its flaws, gave Palestinians in Gaza some measure of relief. Between June and November 2005, an average of 1,300 Palestinians traveled every day in and out of Gaza via Egypt. This ended in 2006, following the Palestinian legislative elections, in which Hamas won the majority of seats on the Palestinian Legislative Council. The numbers of Palestians traveling through Rafah dropped to less than two hundred a day in 2008.

While Israel's extreme restrictions on Palestinian movement continued, Egypt's closure of the Rafah Crossing added insult to injury. The fact that Israel prevents the Palestinians' freedom of movement was something to expect from an occupying settler-colonial regime. But the scenes of thousands of Palestinian students, patients, residents of foreign countries, and workers abroad, stranded on the Palestinian side of Rafah Crossing, were painful to witness. Mubarak's closure of Rafah was perceived as a form of betrayal and abandonment of a people by their brethren on the other side of the border. It wasn't until after the Mavi Marmara[23] events, followed by the uprisings of 2011, when Egyptians took to the streets, that the closure and isolation of Gaza started to slowly diminish, at least from Egypt's side. Following the fall of Mubarak, the numbers of Palestinians traveling through the Rafah Crossing reached a thousand travelers a day. The revolution and the square made an impact. This was exactly what Israel and its allies in the US had feared—for a neighboring Arab country that shares borders with Palestine to cease using Palestinians' basic rights for the sole sake of political blackmail.

Palestine in Tahrir

The rapid change in Egypt's approach towards Palestine and the Palestinian people was not surprising. It came as a surprise only to the Israeli establishment and those in the West who, once again, projected their racism

and dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims, imagining the people of the region only as passive subjects to be ruled and their countries' policies and positions dictated by authoritarian overlords. Yet Mubarak's departure from power, thanks to mass popular mobilization of Egyptians, not only opened the space for political participation but also allowed the Egyptian masses to reclaim what they envisioned as true and genuine expressions of support for the Palestinians.

The square, in a symbolic, metaphorical, and literal sense, was the space that authoritarian leaders like Mubarak and his Arab League colleagues denied their people—a political space where people feel that politics are of their creation, something they can rightfully and effectively own. "Raise your head, you're an Arab," Egyptians and other Arabs chanted in Tahrir, alongside "the people want the liberation of Palestine."[24] In September 2011, thousands of Egyptian demonstrators surrounded and stormed the Israeli embassy in Egypt. Hundreds of protesters stormed the concrete walls surrounding the building. One protester climbed the building, raised the Egyptian flag in place of the Israeli flag, and threw documents to the crowd below that highlighted the scale and nature of Egyptian–Israeli relationships. Three Egyptians were killed and hundreds were wounded in the clashes that surrounded these events. Many lessons and analyses can be drawn from the events at the Israeli embassy. Most importantly, they revealed the fragility of the peace agreements between Israel and the Arab states from the so-called moderate axis, and how only authoritarian regimes with outside support can be reliable partners to the West in maintaining such a status quo. There is a fundamental difference between a peace arrangement signed by Israel and nonrepresentative, authoritarian regimes, and one established by Jewish Israelis and Palestinians, including their Arab neighbors, rooted in people-to-people reconciliation that guarantees rights, freedoms, and dignity to the inhabitants of the region. The latter is harder to achieve and requires a comprehensive political process with a great deal of patience and stamina, but its fruits will be true peace and will guarantee prosperity to the inhabitants of the region.

According to the Arab Opinion Index of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, in 2011, 78 percent of Egyptians said that they object to their country's recognition of Israel. This was the case for Jordan, which also has a peace agreement with Israel, where 81 percent of respondents

said they object to recognizing Israel, as well. As for the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel, only 21 percent of all respondents from the Arab world said they supported the accords. Fast forward to 2017 and 2018, and the same Index shows that 82 percent of Arabs stated that Israeli policies are a threat to the security and stability of the region, while 47 percent said the same of Iran. Moreover, while 84 percent of Arabs rejected recognition of Israel in 2011, this rate grew to 87 percent between 2017 and 2018.[25] For an Arab public to hold such positions towards Israel, including citizens of countries that signed peace treaties with the Israeli state, says a great deal about the "Israeli-inspired regional status quo." The Arab regimes had consolidated power in the hands of a small minority without the consent of the citizenry—something usually not accepted by liberals but tolerated in the case of Israel and its relationship with Palestinians and the Arab world.

Palestinian perceptions of the Arab Spring, a complex picture

Although the Arab uprisings offered unprecedented opportunities to Palestinians by opening new spaces for Arab masses to express their solidarity and support in the squares, not all Palestinians viewed the uprisings as an opportunity to advance their cause. The current composition of the Palestinian political scene, both in the Palestinian homeland and in the diaspora, is diverse, complex, and has suffered from fragmentation. To understand the complexity of Palestinian politics, one can speak of three major camps, though with gray areas and linkages between them. There is an Islamist-nationalist camp, led by the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and other groups such as Islamic Jihad. There is a nationalist-secular camp, led by the National Liberation Movement (Fateh), and a leftist camp that includes groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and others. These factions exist, coexist, and contend within a complex civil society, with many independent and factionally affiliated and unaffiliated individuals and groups, intellectuals and political activists, unions, and other organizations.

Within this wide spectrum, in the Palestinian homeland, in the diaspora, and within each of the political factions there also exists a variety of ideas and beliefs regarding the Palestinians' relationship to Islam; Palestine's political future; visions for the region and for Palestine; and strategic

directions as well as political, economic, and class configurations that might exist in the Palestine these parties seek to create. Therefore, a Palestinian response to events happening in the broader region would be decided by the location of those who form a response in this complex matrix of relationships, interests, and positionality. How Palestinians related to the Arab uprisings has been a source of confusion for many, especially within leftist and progressive circles that are invested in supporting the Palestinian cause for freedom and self-determination in the West, in the US, and in Europe specifically.

Prior to the Arab uprisings in 2011, taking a stance on Arab issues in general was not a priority for progressives and leftists except in opposing US imperialist ventures and interventions in the region. Opposing the Iraq War was the fight that defined the experience of progressives and leftists vis-á-vis the region following 9/11 and during the Bush era. With that exception, Palestine, however, was the chief Arab issue that activists paid close attention to, due to the longevity of the Palestinian cause and the extent to which it is linked to politics within the United States itself. So for activists in the US, a constant focus on Palestine, with the presence of a solidarity movement and a historically active Palestinian community, made leftists, progressives, and members of antiwar movements more aware and relatively informed about internal Palestinian dynamics and issues. Palestinians, too, pushed for centering their voices within these movements, and they brought perspective and input that informed a more complex understanding of Palestine and the Palestinian experience.

This was not the case for other Arab issues. As the movements for democracy, rights, and freedoms unfolded after 2011, the initial response on the part of many in the US left was to support the uprisings, given that the first two initial episodes took place in countries—Tunisia and Egypt—controlled by regimes with positive relationships with the West. Many celebrated the triumphs of the Tunisian and Egyptian people, but then real challenges began when the uprisings spread to Libya and Syria. Although for internal and external reasons each of these uprisings took specific turns and trajectories, the various positions in support of or against the uprisings opened major debates not only in leftist, progressive, and antiwar contexts in the West but also in the Arab world itself.

Of course, the trajectories that the various uprisings took revealed much about each of the countries in which these events unfolded. While the roots

of discontent were almost the same in every country, the outcomes of the protests differed according to internal factors such as the nature and the structure of the state, the extent to which power is dispersed in a given country and concentrated in the hands of the ruling class, the size and capacity of the middle classes, the organization of civil society, and the ability of established actors to engage in political processes to negotiate a democratic transition. Externally, foreign and regional powers saw both opportunities and threats in the uprisings. While some feared a democratic wave, especially with Islamist political parties reconciling Islam and democracy, and therefore questioning the legitimacy enjoyed by certain monarchial regimes in the name of Islam, others saw an opportunity to improve their geopolitical leverage with the West by extending power into the region.

Most of these contradictions have needed decades to take root and crystalize, yet in a matter of months, entire classes and populations found themselves in a situation where they had to address these heavy inheritances all at once. It was said that "Arabs were not ready for democracy."[26] But in reality, it was the international community that was not ready for the uprisings, which called not only for democracy but also for social and economic justice and a reclamation of people's sovereignty in their states.[27]

Palestinians and the Syrian uprising

How then, would a Palestinian response to events such as the first wave of the uprisings look, especially one where people for the first time and on an unprecedented scale have called for reclaiming their sovereignty and self-determination? Palestinian responses to the uprisings were either factionally inspired or unaffiliated and free of factional dictates. It is imperative to know that Palestinian political factions do not operate in a vacuum and in isolation from the surrounding region. In fact, all Palestinian factions took positions vis-á-vis the uprisings, based on strategic calculations about short-term gains and losses. As explained earlier, Arab support (or lack thereof) made Palestinians wary of interfering in Arab affairs, though they watched closely and carefully as developments in the region unfolded. After all, most Palestinians are structurally excluded from institutions that claim to speak on their behalf. On the other hand, factionally unaffiliated

Palestinians enjoyed more freedom in taking positions vis-á-vis the uprisings in whatever way they deemed fit.

The case of Syria was a major test awaiting Palestinians, especially Hamas, which had found financial and political support in Damascus leading up to the uprisings. Although Hamas committed itself to a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries, it found itself under pressure from both the Assad regime and the Syrian masses protesting the regime to take a stance. For the first two months of the Syrian uprising, Khaled Mashal, the former chief of Hamas's political bureau, made an enormous effort to "reconcile both sides"[28] in order to unleash a "reform and change process according to a national consensus away from foreign intervention," but all these attempts failed. And as the gap between the regime and the opposition widened, Hamas found that it was impossible to continue this illusion of neutrality.

Many eyes then became focused on Hamas, waiting for the Palestinian movement to take a final position regarding the events in Syria. Under pressure to specify its position, Hamas issued a statement in April 2011, affirming that it stood on the side of Syria's "leadership and people." The statement emphasized Syrian political and popular support of "the forces of Palestinian resistance" and expressed hope that "Syria would overcome the crisis with outcomes that would realize the wishes of the Syrian people, preserve Syria's stability and its internal cohesion and promote its role in the front of resistance." According to observers, Hamas's statement "did not satisfy any of the sides." Hamas found itself in a dilemma: it did not want to alienate the Syrian regime, but at the same time, as a movement that claimed it stood for liberation and self-determination, it could not ignore these principles in the Syrian context.[29]

As the situation in Syria deteriorated, Hamas decided that members of its political bureau and leadership should begin a process of "quiet, gradual, and unprovocative-to-the-regime exodus" from Syria, a process that continued for months until the entire leadership had left by January 2012. In the early months of 2012, Hamas began to end its "balanced" approach to Syria, and its leadership gave statements "in support of the Intifada of the Syrian people," especially by Gaza-based Hamas leaders such as Ismail Haniyah, the current head of the movement's political bureau. For Hamas, leaving Syria was an inevitable step because "it couldn't afford the political

cost of identifying with the practices of the regime towards its people."[30] From the point of view of Hamas, they envisioned two trajectories with regards to a "post-Bashar" Syria. First was the scenario of "chaos and an expanding civil war." This scenario risked implicating Palestinians in a conflict between various sectarian and regional forces from within and without Syria. The challenge, in light of this scenario, was to accept what the public saw as the principled stance by Hamas and other Palestinian factions, without putting Palestinian interests and existence in Syria at risk, a paradox that of course was hard to achieve.

The other scenario, which in Hamas's calculations was the favorable one, was the toppling of the regime and achieving a formula for stability in Syria based on consensus of Syrian opposition forces on a new political basis. According to that calculation, from the point of view of Hamas and its base of members, advocates, and supporters, a post-Assad Syria would "maintain relationships with Palestinian resistance factions."

Another opening that played into Hamas's calculations regarding Syria was the scenario of the political rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, as part of the increasing influence of the group in the politics of the region in general. This sentiment was expressed by Syrian Muslim Brotherhood leaders such as Mulhem al-Drubi, who expressed his group's position toward the Palestinian resistance. Drubi stated that "Palestinian resistance will have a warmer home in free Syria, and there it will be fully independent and won't be used as leverage [by the authorities] here or there." Zohair Salem, the spokesperson of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, also stated that "the brothers in Hamas, and the rest of our Palestinian brothers, when they come to Syria, they come to their country and to their people, and our cause is one derived from the same cause … and we can't imagine but being one nation."[31]

Ironically, Fateh, the Palestinian faction with the longest history of tension with the Assad regime, saw things differently. Two years after Hamas ended its presence in Syria for the above-mentioned considerations, Fateh restored its ties with the Assad regime in mid-2015. For Fateh, which controls the Palestinian Authority, restoring the relationships with the Assad regime was done to "preserve neutrality" and address the concerns of Palestinians in Syria. Yet they were far from neutral, given that Fateh's leaders flirted with the Syrian regime and even apologized for its practices.

For example, Fateh's central committee member Abbas Zaki "appeared to justify the bombing of Palestinian refugee camps in Syria by comparing these actions to 'a doctor eradicating a failed body part.'"[32]

Disturbingly, Fateh found itself in the same camp with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a secular Palestinian Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary socialist organization, regarding the situation in Syria. During the attacks on Aleppo in 2016, Kayed al-Ghoul, member of the PFLP's political bureau, stated that the regime's recapturing of Aleppo was a "victory against the terrorist forces in Aleppo and Syria" and "a step in the direction of defeating the terrorism targeting Syria as a state and weakening the Arab region."[33] The PFLP, which welcomed Mohamed Morsi's election in 2012, also welcomed his ouster by the military in 2013, before he completed his term. It issued a statement on July 3, 2013, one of very few statements related to the Arab uprisings issued by the revolutionary party, praising Morsi's ouster as a "victory of the will of the people" that would "open the horizons for a change that would bring back to Egypt its pioneering role in the region."[34] Similarly, the Palestinian Authority and Fateh welcomed the ouster. These conflicting positions show the extent to which positions by Palestinian factions on the uprisings were tailored according to each party's political interests.

But the calculations by these factions were not realized as they had hoped. Neither was a Muslim Brotherhood government established in Syria as Hamas wished, nor was a "pioneering role" assumed by Sisi's Egypt in supporting Palestinians, as the PFLP wished. In a post-Morsi Egypt, discourse and activism supportive of Palestinian rights were silenced, and anti-Palestinian sentiments emerged in unprecedented forms in the media.[35] Less than two weeks following the PFLP's statement welcoming the coup, the Marxist organization had to issue another statement, on July 14, condemning the "intentional smearing campaign" against Palestinians in Egyptian media and calling on the "new Egyptian leadership" to open the Rafah Crossing. The smear campaigns against Palestinians in Egyptian media extended to other Arab governments that viewed the uprisings as a threat, such as Saudi Arabia.[36] This showed the extent to which the Palestinian cause can be invoked in the context of debating Arab affairs and issues.

Yet aside from positions taken by Palestinian factions and organized parties, the positions of unaffiliated Palestinians—or even marginalized supporters of the aforementioned factions—did not find their way to public discussion or debate. There have been numerous Palestinian voices, free from the narrow calculations of dominant political parties and groups, that viewed the uprisings from the lens of collective liberation and emancipation. Palestinians called for principled solidarity with fellow Arab protestors from Bahrain to Syria, regardless of regional alignments.[37] These voices protested the brutality of Assad's regime, the Saudi-UAE bombardment of Yemen, and all foreign intervention, out of the firm conviction that Palestinian liberation cannot be realized without the liberation of all peoples in the larger region.

Conclusion

As the first wave of the Arab uprisings suffered setbacks in Syria, Egypt, Bahrain, and Yemen, the situation in Palestine succumbed to rapidly worsening conditions. Palestinian political divisions deepened, Israel became more aggressive, and the blockade on Gaza intensified. Just one year after the coup in Egypt, Israel launched a military operation against the Gaza Strip, one that killed 2,251 Palestinians, wounded thousands more, and brought about unprecedented levels of destruction.[38] The 2014 war showed the extent to which the setbacks in the uprisings can affect Palestinians. As the brutal counterrevolution of the Assad regime set new norms of violence acceptable in the twenty-first century, the Sisi regime turned its back on the plight of Palestinians in Gaza.

The first wave of the Arab uprisings confirmed Kanafani's framework of the "three separate enemies." Israel viewed the uprisings as a threat from the beginning, and it was the first force to invoke a war-on-terror discourse to portray the uprisings as a potential threat. The chief concern for Israel was whether the uprisings would disrupt the fragile regional status quo it had achieved in tandem with Arab regimes. The regional Arab states, pre-uprising and in the transition stage, related to the Palestinian cause either cynically or promoted certain Palestinian interests in response to pressure from the street. Within Palestine a fragmented Palestinian body politic was unable to respond to the changes in the region in a manner that would

prioritize Palestinian interests and concerns, simply because the major Palestinian factions differ fundamentally in their definitions of the national interests of Palestinians and the strategies and ways to achieve them.

In the midst of the confusion resulting from the divergent—and, most importantly, violent—trajectories of the uprisings, there was the question of "what's next for the Palestinian cause." Ghassan Kanafani provided an answer to this question by laying out the major forces detrimental to the Palestinian quest for freedom: the negative role of Arab regimes, a reactionary Palestinian leadership, and imperialist-backed Zionism. The Arab uprisings unfolded in a context where the three forces worked against Palestinian interests in unprecedented ways. Palestinians in Gaza lived under a blockade with partial complicity from a neighboring Arab country, official Arab support dropped, Palestinian leadership committed itself to the role of a subcontractor of the occupation, and Israeli occupation, settlement, and assault on Palestinian rights reached new levels.

A reconfiguration of Arab politics within each country, on *qutri* (local) and *qawmi* (pan-Arab) levels was needed more than ever, as the early years of the Arab uprisings—at least with regards to the "Gaza test," Egypt's approach to its border policy with Gaza—showed. But also, on a political level, democratically elected Egyptian and Arab administrations, sensitive to the wishes of Arab masses and public opinion, can be capable of playing a more effective role in promoting Palestinian interests against Israeli wishes. There is no question that once Arab people reclaim sovereignty in their countries and lead democratic transitions that address major questions in the region, support for full Palestinian liberation will follow.



Part 3

Workers of the World, Unite



7

What Palestinians Ask of Us

The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement

An interview with Omar Barghouti by Sumaya Awad & brian bean

In 2005 more than 170 organizations of Palestinian civil society put out a call to action for people around the globe to boycott, divest from, and sanction (BDS) the state of Israel. Inspired by the struggle against South African apartheid, and drawing on a long tradition of boycotts within Palestine, the BDS call was issued by a representative coalition of organizations both in historical Palestine and in exile. Focusing on a rights-based framework and appealing to international law, the call focuses on achieving three core demands placed on Israel:

1. *Ending the occupation and colonization of all Arab lands stolen in the Nakba and dismantling the Apartheid Wall.*
2. *Recognizing the fundamental rights of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality.*

3. *Respecting, promoting, and protecting the rights of Palestinian refugees, including their right to return to their homes and properties as stipulated by United Nations Resolution 194.*

Many individuals, unions, campus groups, churches, artists, academics, socialist groups, political parties, and others have since taken up this Palestinian-led call and engaged in local activism around BDS through a myriad of ways to target the Israeli state and corporations that profit from the occupation. This call has become a true international movement that has galvanized the struggle for Palestine around the world. In this interview we talk with Omar Barghouti, a cofounder of BDS, about the current movement. For more introductory information on BDS, see the comprehensive website bdsmovement.net and Barghouti's indispensable book Boycott, Divestment Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights.



Since 2008 we have seen in the United States a deep radicalization expressed, developed, and deepened by the Occupy movement, the Black Lives Matter movement, the opening around socialism of the first Sanders campaign, and the growth of the Democratic Socialists of America, among other expressions. Why is it essential that this new socialist radicalization and new layer of radical activists squarely take up the question of Palestine and BDS specifically? Why BDS, and why now?

Omar Barghouti: For too long many US progressives have willfully excluded Palestine from the spectrum of justice struggles that they supported, earning the label "Progressive Except Palestine," or PEP. By "progressive" in the US, I mean a broad term with no clear definition. It has been appropriated and abused at times by neoliberals like Hillary Clinton and her like. But as I understand it, it includes standing for social, racial, and economic justice, especially respect, recognition, and institutionalization of the rights of women, people of color, indigenous people, LGBTQI people, and support for climate justice. The exclusion of Palestine was due to several factors, most important of which is the strong

influence of Zionists and the weakness of pro-Palestine voices among progressive movements. Supporting justice for Palestinians entailed paying a heavy political or financial price, as many activists and groups in the US had learned the hard way.

But in the last few years, especially with the growing appeal of socialism and social democracy and the rising impact of the BDS Movement for Palestinian rights, things have changed significantly, perhaps nearing a tipping point among progressives. PEP is giving way to PIP—Progressive *Including* Palestine, as Israel and Zionism are becoming increasingly associated with the far right, white supremacy, and even fascist tendencies in the US, Europe, India, Latin America, the Philippines and elsewhere, particularly in the Trump era, where masks are falling.

In contrast, BDS has become an inseparable and organic part of the global progressive, anti-fascist wave. It is important to include justice and self-determination for Palestinians in progressive agendas not only because standing with the oppressed in their struggle against oppression, as was the case in fighting apartheid in South Africa and Jim Crow in the US South, is part of the definition of being progressive. It is also a profound moral obligation to do no harm, to strive to end one's complicity in maintaining oppressive regimes.

The fact that boundless and unconditional US financial, military, diplomatic, academic, and political support is the main reason why Israel's regime of military occupation, settler colonialism, and apartheid can continue to deny Palestinian rights triggers the fundamental ethical obligation for US citizens, progressives in particular, to pressure US institutions, elected officials, and government to end this complicity.

With Trump's unprecedented partnership in entrenching and defending its crimes, Israel has intensified its genocidal policies[1] to bury Palestinian rights and to disappear Palestinians as a people and as a liberation cause. Israel's twelve-year-old siege of two million Palestinians in Gaza, for instance, has made the Strip "unlivable," according to the UN, reducing it to a slow-death camp, where water is unfit for human consumption, food is scarce, health services are near collapse, and the general possibility of sustenance is elusive.[2] This should alarm all humans, especially progressives in the US, as their elected government shares a major part of

the responsibility for the crimes against humanity that Israel is perpetrating against Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere.

As we approach the fifteenth anniversary of the 2005 call for BDS from Palestinian civil society organizations, we have seen a marked change in sympathy with the cause for Palestine. In the United States, opinion polls reflect a slow but significant shift, especially among young people, in being more critical of Israeli apartheid. A number of large Protestant churches have adopted BDS measures. High-profile musicians have heeded the call for cultural boycott and canceled concerts in Israel. We also have seen the election of a small group of women socialist Congress members who have voiced criticisms of Israel's actions at a higher degree than has been seen before. The BDS Movement obviously has played a central role in this transformation. Can you talk about that role and what it says about BDS, where it is, and where it needs to go?

With its universal and intersectional approach to human rights, its antiracist platform, and support by many progressives, BDS has succeeded in integrating the struggle for Palestinian freedom, justice, and equality in the middle of the progressive agenda.

As Israel and its lobby groups are realizing, Israel's steady shift to the far right over the last decade has led to not just strengthening progressive support for BDS but also alienating the liberal mainstream. Jewish millennials in the US are increasingly supporting justice for the Palestinian people, including through BDS tactics.

Trump's embrace of Benjamin Netanyahu and his far-right government and the fact that Israel's apartheid and colonial policies have become models emulated by the Trump administration in implementing its anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and xenophobic agenda have led to a tipping point for our struggle. For the first time ever, it has become acceptable, albeit still very controversial, in Congress to call for BDS against Israel to bring about its compliance with international law, and it has become perfectly legitimate in the mainstream to advocate BDS tactics to achieve Palestinian liberation.[3] Of those in the Democratic Party who have heard of BDS,

almost half support the movement, as a recent University of Maryland poll shows.[4]

The growing intersectional partnership between the struggle for Palestinian rights and the struggles for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, LGBTQ, gender and climate justice, and the growing support from Jewish progressives for Palestinian liberation have led to significant traction for BDS across the US. Dozens of student governments on campuses, large and small, have adopted divestment or other BDS measures against corporations implicated in Israel's grave human rights violations. More mainline churches than ever are adopting divestment and calling for cutting US military aid to Israel. More artists and academics are refusing to lend their names to Israel's apartheid and colonial regime. Some US labor unions as well are courageously adopting BDS, despite the massive backlash from union leadership.[5]

The challenge for BDS now is to effectively translate this growing grassroots support into policy change at the local, state, and eventually federal level, as was done in the struggle against South African apartheid. The Deadly Exchange campaign led by Jewish Voice for Peace, a key BDS partner in the US, is an inspiring example of a BDS campaign that seeks a gradual policy shift. It targets exchange programs between US police forces and their Israeli counterparts by exposing how their partnership is not only entrenching Israeli apartheid and criminal oppression of Palestinians but also exacerbating the racism, militarism, and extreme brutality of US police forces.

The flip side to these developments is the fierce reaction to BDS internationally and in the US especially. From Germany's federal level anti-BDS resolution to the largely symbolic but still frightening US federal legislation, like HR246 that mentioned you by name, to the thirty-plus similar bills being pushed on the state level, there is pushback. These endeavors, alongside moves to counter BDS activism on campus, are receiving backing and funding from the Israeli state. In some ways the amount of energy that Israel is spending to try to affect activism on college campuses and by pop stars reflects how effective BDS is. How can we counter this reaction?

Israel and its lobby groups are investing hundreds of millions of dollars and massive political, academic, cultural, and other assets in fighting BDS because they realize that with its mask off, Israel's regime of oppression is losing grassroots and civil society support worldwide. BDS is inspiring millions to translate that into effective measures to isolate this regime in all fields, in support of Palestinian rights under international law.

While Israel is drunk with power and celebrating its relative success in passing anti-BDS legislation or resolutions in twenty-seven states across the US, in the German Bundestag, and elsewhere, it is missing the growing undercurrent of resentment and apprehension that its McCarthyite tactics are creating. Three federal courts have already frozen the respective anti-BDS legislation of the states of Kansas, Texas, and Arizona, citing their incompatibility with the First Amendment of the US Constitution. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which is playing a decisive role in exposing the unconstitutionality of Israel's legal warfare, or lawfare, against BDS, has condemned anti-BDS legislation as "reminiscent of McCarthy-era loyalty oaths."[6] A recent poll shows that 72 percent of all Americans "oppose laws that penalize people who boycott Israel because these laws infringe on the Constitutional right to free speech and peaceful protest."[7]

As part of its lawfare on BDS, and after failing to inhibit the impressive growth of the movement and its global impact, Israel, with its lobby groups, has been aggressively pushing a new, fraudulent definition of "antisemitism" that is designed to delegitimize the struggle for Palestinian rights and to shield Israel from accountability to international law.

In 2018, more than forty international Jewish groups, including the influential Jewish Voice for Peace in the US, condemned the conflation between "legitimate criticisms of Israel and advocacy for Palestinian rights with antisemitism, as a means to suppress the former." Their statement said, "This conflation undermines both the Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and equality and the global struggle against antisemitism. It also serves to shield Israel from being held accountable to universal standards of human rights and international law."[8]

Condemnation for the Bundestag's adoption of this definition as a basis for its anti-Palestinian, anti-BDS resolution came not just from Palestinian

society but also from many human rights groups and leading intellectuals worldwide.[9] More than 240 Jewish and Israeli scholars, including authorities on antisemitism and history of the Holocaust, for instance, issued a statement accusing the "deceitful" resolution of doing nothing to "advance the urgent fight against anti-Semitism" and of ignoring the BDS movement's explicit condemnation of "all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism."[10]

Daniel Blatman, a prominent Israeli Holocaust era historian and chief historian of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum, was even more blunt. He wrote:

> That is how a country where anti-Semitism was a political tool that contributed to the rise of the Nazis' murderous enterprise became a country that promotes distortion of anti-Semitism as a tool to facilitate the political persecution of a nonviolent [BDS] movement that fights the occupation, the oppression of the Palestinians and the war crimes Israel perpetrates in the territories.[11]

Countering Israel's lawfare requires exposing its far-right agenda and the toxic influence of its militarization-securitization model around the world, from India to Chile, and from Europe to the US, as well as further strengthening intersectional struggles that integrate Palestinian rights in progressive agendas.

In 2018 Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar were elected to Congress. Tlaib, a Palestinian-American, and Omar, a Somali refugee, have both defied the status quo narrative on Palestine in Congress by openly criticizing US funding of Israel's apartheid regime and US imperialism's reliance on Israel. Their positions are very atypical for candidates within the Democratic Party in particular. In the lead-up to the 2020 elections we saw a leftward shift the US hasn't witnessed in decades. Candidates like Bernie Sanders have openly claimed they will consider cutting funds to Israel, following Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib's rejection of entry by Israel for their delegation to Palestine. Can you comment on this?

For some time now this shift in the Democratic Party has been happening, and there are key indicators. In a 2018 Brookings Institute poll, for instance, 56 percent support imposing "sanctions or more serious measures" on Israel if it continued to build illegal settlements, and 64 percent of all Americans

"support a single democratic state in which Arabs and Jews are equal even if that means Israel would no longer be a politically Jewish state."[12]

US military aid to Israel with time has steadily been shifting from being justifiable in terms of US "national security," which translates into serving the interests of the 1 percent, to almost becoming an article of faith for US elected officials and lawmakers who do not dare to question it.[13] The fact that the evangelical Christian Zionist lobby and the white supremacist tendency in the US have grown considerably in the last decade may offer part of the explanation for this phenomenon, as the intimidation and bullying pressures that Israel lobby groups put on elected officials who dare to question unconditional aid to Israel have become virtually unbearable. But even that taboo is being shattered. Conditioning aid to Israel on its respect for some Palestinian rights has become far less taboo in the Democratic Party quite rapidly of late.[14]

Of course Israel still serves the interest of the US establishment, particularly the military-security industry, which stands to gain from Israel's habitual wars waged against the Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians, and others, testing the latest US weaponry and contributing to the US war economy. The fact that most of the US military aid to Israel goes back to this military-security industry in the US underlines this factor.

As I have written elsewhere, Israel's lobby in Washington is recognized today, as a 2015 right-wing poll shows, by three out of four "opinion elites" in the Democratic Party as wielding "too much influence" on US foreign policy.[15] Whether one argues that the tail is wagging the imperial dog or the other way around, one cannot but accept that the tail and the dog are organically connected! US imperial interests and Israel's massive influence go hand in hand.

But reflecting the swelling grassroots support for holding Israel to account over its crimes against the Palestinian people, more ranking politicians, including key Democratic presidential nominees, are now ready to advocate for leveraging US aid to Israel to bring about its at least partial compliance with international law. This shift in US public opinion is due to several factors, including many years of hard work by Palestine solidarity activists in progressive circles, Israel's steady shift to the far right and its inability to maintain the worn-out mask of liberalism, and Israel's embrace

of white supremacists, xenophobes and even fascist forces in the US, Europe, and elsewhere despite their patently antisemitic positions, or what may be termed the "Trump effect."

The dramatic shift in young Jewish Americans' views of Israel and their growing support for Palestinian rights, including using BDS tactics, has also played an important role in this overall shift. It effectively undermined the weaponized use of the false antisemitism charge by Israel and its lobby groups to muzzle criticism of Israel and calls for imposing sanctions on it. Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar's public endorsement of BDS and senators Sanders and Feinstein's public defense of the right to boycott Israel to achieve Palestinian rights must be seen in this light. After all, 72 percent of all Americans today oppose anti-BDS legislation.

One of the features of the radicalization is a general tendency toward a pro-solidarity politics. We see the usefulness of concepts like intersectionality on one hand and also the way in which the Trump presidency has in a sense centralized and connected struggles due to the many-pronged nature of his attacks. This has meant that many of the activists that we interact with stand generally in solidarity with Palestine. The question we often encounter—very much from a position of sympathy and solidarity—is, with so much injustice going on, *Why this? Why Palestine?* What do we say to the West Virginia teacher fighting against charter schools and environmental devastation, indigenous activists fighting dispossession and environmental devastation, folks who are trying to stop concentration camps at the border? When we talk about struggles being materially connected, how does Palestine figure in and help inform a strategy and program for shared struggle?

Palestinian rights are seen today by much of the world as the "litmus test for human rights," as described by John Dugard, prominent South African jurist and former UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights.[16] This means that oppressed communities worldwide increasingly recognize international complicity in maintaining Israel's settler-colonial and apartheid regime as undermining the very legitimacy of the law-based international order.

On the other hand, the success of the BDS Movement for Palestinian rights in compelling giant multinationals, like Veolia and Orange, to abandon their illegal Israeli projects, whether due to loss of multi-billion-dollar projects or reputational damage, has inspired many justice movements.

As savage capitalism reaches a new phase of power and wealth consolidation in the hands of fewer and fewer oligarchs, banks, and corporations, our enemies are more united than ever. Uniting global progressive movements is, therefore, not only ethically required but also politically necessary for any justice struggle to succeed.

When the largest farmers' union in India adopted BDS, it was motivated by a strong sense of internationalism, rooted in India's once historic role as a leading supporter of liberation movements, and a just as strong commitment to resisting the corporate takeover of the Indian agriculture sector by Israeli, among other, corporate criminals.[17]

Similarly, a 2015 Black for Palestine statement endorsing BDS highlighted the call to boycott G4S, the world's largest security firm, due to its complicity at the time in Israel's brutal imprisonment of Palestinian political prisoners and in the private incarceration system in the US, which disproportionately targets young Black and brown men.[18]

In 2016, the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC), the largest Palestinian coalition that leads the global BDS movement, was among the first to unwaveringly stand in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux tribe in its struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline project. The BNC statement said:

> The BNC supports the restoration of all lands guaranteed by treaty to the Standing Rock Sioux and all other indigenous nations. As indigenous Palestinians, we pledge to stand in solidarity with indigenous peoples around the world, including in Turtle Island, in their struggles for justice, self-determination, restoration of rights and respect for their heritage.[19]

Intersectionality, a concept that we have learned from Black feminists in the US, is fast becoming an indispensable component of effective justice struggles of oppressed communities around the world.

To build on the subject of intersectionality: most commonly the concept is used to explain the way in which multiple oppressions overlap and interweave in what Black socialist feminist and Combahee River Collective founder Barbara Smith calls the "simultaneity of oppression." In activist circles there is a macro-sense of the word that is used as a synonym for how struggles against different types of oppression are linked. Looked at in this way you can see how the question of Palestine both benefits from and contributes to this understanding.

We in the BDS Movement subscribe to the view that oppressions not only intersect but often evolve together in the fields of race, class, and gender, among others. As a result, we believe that resistance must be intersectional too. It is not only ethically compelling to connect resistance against all forms of oppression; it is also a necessity in today's world, particularly this new, Trumpian era of savage neoliberalism, mainstream xenophobia, aggravated racism, and open disdain for democracy and human rights.

We work with various justice movements to develop models for resisting together, beyond mutual solidarity, and we also take seriously the question: How can Palestine contribute to other struggles? Despite our relative weakness as a liberation struggle, Palestinians still command much more international attention and solidarity than many other oppressed groups worldwide. This makes us consider sharing our experiences with others while we simultaneously learn from theirs.

The BDS Movement in the United States has been most successful—with the possible exception of the churches—on college campuses through the activism of Students for Justice in Palestine and through the work to have various academic associations participate in the movement via the academic boycott. Elsewhere in the world, especially in Europe and in South Africa, there have been more successes in trade unions and even on the state level, as in the recent example of Ireland's Occupied Territories Bill. In some ways this makes sense both because of the ideological effect of the centrality of Israel in the US imperial project but also because of the relative weakness of the US labor movement. As socialists we think that workers and labor have immense

power in society, so activating this will be essential. How can rank-and-file militants bring BDS into the labor movement?

Some of the largest trade union federations from Brazil to South Africa and from India to Europe and Canada have adopted BDS as the most effective way to end their respective state's complicity in Israeli apartheid and to stand with Palestinians in general, and workers in particular, in their struggle for their human and political rights. This is not new, as the international labor movement played a decisive role in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

In the US, many coopted and/or corrupt leaders of the labor movement have aligned their unions with Israel and its system of colonial oppression. The AFL-CIO is deeply complicit in Israeli apartheid through its massive investments in Israel bonds, Israeli banks, and more; and through its anti-Palestinian positions. The AFL-CIO has a long history of supporting the Histadrut, Israel's labor federation that played, and still does in different forms, a prominent role in the colonization and ethnic cleansing of Palestine.[20] By some estimates, its Israel-related investments may reach $5 billion. When Richard Trumka was elected president of the AFL-CIO in 2009, he ignored progressive appeals and harshly denounced BDS.[21] This is not surprising given the close ties between the AFL-CIO and the US Central Intelligence Agency during the cold war to subvert progressive, anti-imperialist movements and governments around the world.[22]

Still, some US unions with progressive leaders have recognized that Israel is an integral and particularly influential part of the global far right, that it supports military dictatorships and genocidal regimes from Latin America to Africa to Asia, and that it is a key player in maintaining US imperialism. This has led to more support for Palestinian liberation, including BDS.

In 2014, UAW Local 2865, the union representing student workers at the University of California, became the first US union to join the BDS Movement. The thirty-thousand-strong United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) in 2015 became the second national labor union in the US to endorse BDS. The National Labor Relations Board

has dismissed attempts by a pro-Israel lobby organization to legally challenge the union's decision.

To further grow support for BDS in the US labor movement, more education is needed about the role Israel's regime of oppression and its military-security complex play globally in intrusive surveillance, in arming and training despotic regimes, and in spreading the doctrines and tools of militarization and securitization that are used by far-right forces against communities of color, workers, farmers, and other oppressed groups.

We also need to highlight the crucial connection between imperialist wars, the consolidation of power and wealth in the hands of the few, and the eroding wages and rights of workers in the US and elsewhere. Struggling to end US wars on mostly people of color overseas is inextricably linked to struggles for economic and social justice at home.

In addition, to further integrate BDS in labor struggles in the US, intersectional and strategic targets need to be identified, connecting struggles for labor rights with global struggles for freedom and justice, including in Palestine.

Earlier this year, several BDS chapters called for a boycott of Saudi Arabia over its US-backed war on Yemen. What role do you see the BDS Movement having in the wider struggle against imperialism in the Middle East?

In 2018, the BDS Movement issued an important statement calling on "progressives and social movements everywhere to pressure their governments to impose strict military embargoes on all states that are perpetrating crimes against humanity and war crimes, including Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Myanmar."[23]

Since its inception, the global, Palestinian-led BDS movement has believed that Palestinian freedom, justice, and equality are directly linked to the struggles for democracy, human rights, social and economic justice, gender equality, and more, in our region and across the world. Despotic Arab regimes are simultaneously the enemies of their peoples and of the Palestinian cause.

While BDS adheres to its human rights mandate quite strictly, it stands in solidarity with oppressed communities everywhere fighting oppression

and aspiring to a life of justice, freedom, and dignity.

The BDS Movement, anchored in international law and human rights principles, uses universally understood language that accurately describes the question of Palestine and what's needed to end international complicity in Israel's denial of Palestinian rights. In a nutshell, BDS adopts what may be described by hardcore leftists as a "liberal" rights-based stance. But in the Trump era, in particular, rights-based struggles, whether for racial, economic, social, gender, or climate justice, cannot but oppose the domination and hegemony of multinationals, banks, and the global 1 percent over the rest of humanity. These struggles have no choice but to resist the latest forms of brute imperial domination, as exercised by Trump and to some extent European powers, which transcends economic exploitation and pillage to engage in downright systematic disintegration of nations and cultures to make them more exploitable. This is what we are seeing in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Sudan, among other Black and brown nations.

The last demand of BDS—for right of return—is one that is continually under fire. In the context of an international refugee crisis, especially in the Middle East and North Africa and Central and South American areas, and with xenophobic racism playing such a big role in the resurgent far-right movements in Europe and the US, can you talk about the importance of this demand and its connection to the wider question of refugees internationally?

The right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and lands of origin, from which they were ethnically cleansed during the Nakba and ever since, is an inherent right that is solidly anchored in international law. It is non-negotiable. Those who deny that right in order to maintain Israel's anti-Palestinian supremacy and apartheid regime reveal their racist agenda. Palestinian refugees, like all other refugees, are entitled to the right of return and reparations.

The explosion of armed conflicts and civil wars, heightened imperialist exploitation, and blockage of reparations for centuries of colonialism, including slavery, are the main factors behind the recent waves of refugees and asylum seekers from Africa, Latin America, and Asia trying to reach affluent Western countries. Far-right politicians are using this phenomenon

to fan the flames of extreme nationalism, xenophobia, and racism and to undermine democracy, human rights, and international law in the interest of neoliberal forces.

When I was visiting London as a teenager, I once saw a demonstration in front of the famous department store Selfridges by South Asians against anti-Asian racism in the UK. One protestor carried a sign that read: "We are here because you were there!" This summed up the causal relationship between colonial injustices and the flood of refugees.

In the case of Palestinian refugees, their expulsion from their homeland was a key part of the Western-supported Zionist settler-colonial project in Palestine, which has always been rooted in European colonialism and in the doctrine of "maximum land, minimum Arabs." Uprooting the majority of the indigenous Palestinians to establish Israel as a supremacist and exclusionary colonial state was, therefore, not coincidental but very much by design.

The ethical solution to the refugee "crisis" around the world is by ending the oppressive conditions that force people to flee their homes and embark on risky journeys to seek refuge in safer places. Justice and reparations are the foundations of ethically addressing this crisis. Similarly, only ending Israel's regime of oppression can open the door for Palestinian refugees to exercise their inherent and UN-stipulated right to return and to reparations.

What role does BDS play in advancing the struggle for Palestinian liberation? What will it take for the Palestine movement to "win," and what is the relationship between BDS and the larger movement for Palestinian liberation?

BDS is one of the main forms of Palestinian popular resistance against Israel's regime of military occupation, settler colonialism, and apartheid. It is also the most important form of international solidarity within this resistance. BDS alone can never achieve Palestinian liberation, but its most important contribution to this process is its creative and strategic linking between internal popular resistance and external solidarity. By presenting to people of conscience worldwide their moral obligation to end complicity in Israel's human rights violations, BDS empowers millions who stand in

solidarity with Palestinian liberation to translate this solidarity effectively and strategically.

In addition to the fact that BDS is the form of international solidarity that has been called for by Palestinian civil society, what makes it the “most important form of international solidarity”? You mention that “BDS alone” will not be what achieves liberation. Can you say more about how BDS interlocks with the other elements of these processes?

In the last few decades, no other form of solidarity with the struggle for Palestinian liberation has been as effective and impactful as BDS. The BDS Movement has succeeded in unifying Palestinian demands of the world, integrating Palestinian justice with various international justice struggles, and charting a path to ending complicity in Israel’s violations of Palestinian rights as the most consequential form of solidarity.

BDS has transformed solidarity with Palestine from mostly symbolic gestures that had little impact on Israel’s regime of oppression to strategic campaigns that are increasingly isolating this regime.

Internal popular resistance and effective external solidarity, especially in the form of BDS, must work hand in hand to muster the power needed to undermine Israel’s regime of oppression and achieve Palestinian liberation.

BDS activists rightly point to the historic victory in South Africa against apartheid. While properly celebrating the tremendous victory of both international and massive struggle within South Africa that won this important step, there is another side. Post-apartheid South Africa still has massive gaps—very much around lines of race—of income and nearly every other measures of quality of life. South African activist Trevor Ngwane said “There are no miracles in history, and this has been decisively proven in South Africa, where the miracle is turning out to be nothing but the betrayal of workers by its self-appointed liberators.”[24] While we look to South Africa as a beacon of hopeful possibility, are there any cautionary lessons to glean and thus not repeat?

In my non-BDS writings, I have argued consistently that political freedom means very little if not accompanied by economic and social justice. Granting the vote to the Black majority has certainly ended political apartheid in South Africa but did precious little to challenge “economic apartheid,” or structural economic privileges disproportionately enjoyed by the white minority at the expense of social and economic empowerment programs for the Black majority.

While this is well beyond the BDS mandate, the third right in the historic 2005 BDS call, which is the right of Palestinian refugees to return and receive reparations, is crucial in this context. Winning that right, as we must, would ensure a basic level of economic justice that would undermine Israel’s economic, not just political-ethnic, apartheid.



8

Multiple Jeopardy

Gender and Liberation in Palestine

Nada Elia

> "We have more strength than any man. The strength that I showed the first day of the protests, I dare you to find it in anyone else."
>
> —*Razan Najjar*

Palestinian women and queers in the homeland are often asked by concerned Westerners how we negotiate the challenges of living full, rewarding lives in a conservative society. Those of us in the Western diaspora are asked if we are not better off, really, living in "modern" societies where we can wear whatever we want and go wherever we want. These questions are misguided. Instead, Palestinians should be asked how we persist, how we continue to live, love, and care, in a society that is living under Israel's brutal system of apartheid, intent on erasing our very existence and history. We should be asked how we persist under the rule of

law of an ethno-supremacist country that views each and every one of us as a "demographic threat," simply for being who we are. We should be asked how our youth retain the impulse to be free, when trigger-happy Israeli soldiers and snipers are ordered to kill unarmed children demanding their human rights. We should be asked how we continue to build community, nurture each other, and denounce settler colonialism in the same breath as we reject patriarchy. And anyone who is concerned that those of us in the diaspora are better off than in Palestine should stop and think about who is the greater oppressor of the Palestinian people, including women and queers: Israel, which denies every Palestinian their basic rights, or Palestinian society, with its at times stifling "traditional values," which are often little more than an attempt to hold on to one's culture, threatened with erasure.[1] And they should consider that, for the millions of us longing for the homeland, our diaspora is not a choice but a reality imposed upon the Palestinian people by Israel.

I begin, reluctantly, with a brief discussion of the Western discourse on Palestine because I believe it is of critical importance to our circumstances, as the question of Palestine is a global one, with close to 80 percent of the entire Palestinian people forcibly displaced from their ancestral towns and villages, while Israel, which dispossessed us, receives financial support and political immunity from Western powers.[2] Indeed, the recognition of the West's critical role in ending the oppression of the Palestinian people is implicit in the fact that the liberation strategy agreed upon by a broad coalition of Palestinian civil society organizations, namely the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement (BDS), hinges on global solidarity by individuals living in those countries that can impact Israel—and these happen to be mostly in the West. Nevertheless, as far as the mainstream discourse in the West is concerned, Palestinian women and queers either do not exist or are oppressed by "Islamic fundamentalism," with little recognition of Israel's violence, much of which is gendered.

The longstanding Western refusal to address Palestinian women's struggles was made clear in 1985, when a patronizing Betty Friedan, an icon of Western feminism, with its "the personal is political" rallying call, attempted to censor the prominent Egyptian feminist Nawal El Saadawi at the United Nations International Conference on Women held in Nairobi, Kenya. "Please do not bring up Palestine in your speech," Friedan told El

Saadawi. And in a stunning demonstration of bad faith and intellectual laziness, both stemming from unfettered racism, Friedan "explained" to the fiery Arab feminist that "this is a women's conference, not a political conference."[3]

Friedan obviously had no clue who she was dealing with. As El Saadawi later wrote, in a clear articulation of the political condition of Palestinian women:

> Of course in my speech, I did not heed what she [Friedan] had said to me since I believe that women's issues cannot be dealt with in isolation from politics. The emancipation of women in the Arab region is closely linked to the regimes under which we live, regimes which are supported by the USA in most cases, and the struggle between Israel and Palestine has an important impact on the political situation. Besides, how can we speak of liberation for Palestinian women without speaking of their right to have a land on which to live? How can we speak about Arab women's rights in Palestine and Israel without opposing the racial discrimination exercised against them by the Israeli regime?[4]

White/Western feminism's attempt at erasing the political context of Palestinian women's oppression was evident yet again around the 2017 Women's March on Washington, when liberal feminists objected to the leadership of Palestinian American organizer Linda Sarsour, and the newly minted "Zionesses" complained of "antisemitism" because Palestinian women's circumstances were on the platform, as part of a broader discussion of US President Donald Trump's Muslim ban and the overall Islamophobia he pandered to. Interestingly, the "Zioness Movement" sprouted on the US activist scene with the explicit intention to counter feminists who were successfully denouncing Zionism. It chose the slogan "Unabashedly progressive, unapologetically Zionist" in direct response to the growing, if belated, understanding among many Western feminists that Zionism is racism and has no place in progressive movements.[5] This understanding had become obvious, for example, when the largest academic women's organization, the National Women's Studies Association, voted in favor of BDS at its November 2015 annual convention. Meanwhile, in street protests and at LGBTQ meetings, anti-Zionist activists in cities from Seattle, Washington, to Berlin, Germany, were also rallying in support of Palestinian rights, disrupting "pinkwashing" events, and leading major national marches.

Pinkwashing is Israel's smoke-and-mirrors attempt to distract from its egregious human rights record by foregrounding its own supposed gender liberalism while directing an accusing finger at Palestinian society. Anti-pinkwashing activists have successfully disrupted such propaganda by pointing out that Israeli society overall is quite conservative; Israel is only "gay-friendly" when it serves its political purposes and only when individual gay people are Israelis or the much-coveted Western tourists.[6] Simply put, Israel does not make exceptions for queer Palestinian refugees when it comes to the denial of their right of return; an Israeli soldier does not inquire about a Palestinian individual's sexuality as they go through a checkpoint, letting queers through while detaining straight Palestinians; and house demolition crews do not spare the homes of gay Palestinians.[7]

It is in this context of the complete erasure of Palestinian women (and more generally, but not as consistently, Arab and Muslim women as well) that one must understand the statement made by former US secretary of state Madeleine Albright as she rallied for Hillary Clinton—a solid booster of the apartheid state—in the 2016 presidential campaign: "There is a special place in hell for women who do not help each other."[8] Albright later apologized for that comment, just as she had earlier apologized for answering a question about the deaths of half a million Iraqi children as a result of US sanctions with "We think the price is worth it."[9]

Meanwhile, in Palestine itself, women and queers have all along been actively resisting their own "special place in hell," battered by Western imperialism and Israel's unrelenting genocidal intent on the one hand and Palestinian culture's lingering patriarchal values on the other. In the masculinist, patriarchal dominant discourse, "struggle," especially "national struggle," is generally understood as armed resistance. Yet armed resistance is only one of many ways Palestinians have fought their oppression and certainly not the most effective, as it has never achieved any lasting victories. Another, more comprehensive understanding of "resistance" would take into consideration all the ways we persevere against the odds—that is, our *sumoud* (steadfastness) when Zionists are intent on erasing our very existence. As the popular Palestinian saying goes, "Our mere existence is resistance."

Specifically, Palestinian women's resistance is as old as the national struggle itself, predating the 1948 Nakba, and has taken on many forms, from the unarmed storming of British Mandate barracks, the sheltering of orphans, and the behind-the-scenes political organizing throughout the First Intifada to community building in the diaspora, fostering safe spaces for queers, providing Palestinian children access to playgrounds, and insisting on Palestinian rights to the US Congress. It is often observed that history is written by the victors. What is not sufficiently denounced, except in feminist narratives, is that history is also primarily a record of men's fighting, with rarely any mention of women's contributions unless these happen to have taken place in traditionally masculine fields. (Leila Khaled, for example, who hijacked planes, is much better known than Hind al-Husseini, discussed below, who sheltered orphans.) Nevertheless, knowing and understanding a society requires that we look to its alternative history, which only seldom makes it into textbooks. And while no list of Palestinian women's accomplishments in this alternative history can possibly be exhaustive, it is helpful to give a brief sampling of such achievements so as to best illustrate the multiple ways we, as Palestinian women, are navigating the murky waters.

Beginning almost a century ago, when Palestine was still under the British Mandate, with a very strict martial law imposed on the Palestinian people, Palestinian women were already organizing against colonialism. In fact, throughout the 1920s, women were marching side by side with men in protests against Britain's plan to give part of their homeland to European Jewish settlers—a plan first made public in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which Britain promptly set into action by facilitating the influx of Jewish immigrants, even as it forcefully repressed Palestinian opposition to their dispossession.[10] The harshness of the British Mandate may pale in comparison to the horrors of Zionism, with its insatiable expansionist ambitions, yet its impact should not be overlooked as we survey Palestinian women's contributions to their society's resistance to imperialism and settler colonialism. For example, members of the Arab Women's Union in Jerusalem, established in 1929, were active participants in political protests; they provided shelter and medical aid to fighters and played a pioneering role in raising social awareness of the importance of women's liberation to the overall well-being of their society. The General Union of Palestinian Women, an umbrella organization for various Palestinian women's groups,

founded in 1965, remains active today in both the social and political spheres and links gender equality with national liberation. The Palestinian Women's Work Committees, formed in the late 1970s, focused on the mass recruitment of women; as a result, today many women's organizations have memberships in the thousands, addressing the many challenges facing Palestinian women, from education to employment to national liberation.[11]

One of the early examples of Palestinian women's resistance to colonialism happened in the late 1930s,[12] when the British stormed the militant village of Baqa al-Gharbiya, near Haifa, burning down its houses and taking away all its men to a nearby camp—sadly, a common occurrence as the British were quashing Palestinian resistance to their imperial plans. That same night, the village women, "armed" only with rocks, descended upon the barracks and successfully secured the release of the men. Throughout the mandate, women continued to contribute directly to the resistance by selling their jewelry in order to purchase guns for fighters, even though there was a very strict British ban against Palestinians having any weapons, with hefty penalties for possession. Women also formed social clubs that acted as and evolved into fronts for political organizing. These groups maintained the social network essential for any functional society whose men had to go into hiding or were exiled for their participation in the revolt against the imperial plan to dispossess them.

The British Mandate gave way to Jewish Zionism's stranglehold on Palestine, and any serious overview of Palestinian women's contribution to the survival and well-being of our society must pay tribute to Jerusalemite Hind al-Husseini, who used her personal privilege to found Dar al-Tifel al-Arabi, an orphanage she established in 1948 and that continues to offer Palestinian children shelter, education, food, and fun to this day. In April 1948, after Zionist militia raided the village of Deir Yassin, killing, decapitating, and raping a majority of the adults in one of the many horrific massacres predating the bloody birth of Israel, the Jewish terrorists rounded up fifty-five orphaned children, most of whom were under nine years old, and paraded them in Palestine's capital city to be stoned and spat on before abandoning them there, homeless, terrified, cold, and hungry.[13] When Hind al-Husseini, a member of a prominent Jerusalemite family, saw the children, she took them all under her aegis, first housing them in two rooms in a nearby market, where she visited with them daily, comforting them and

feeding them, then moving them to a convent before moving them one last time to her own family home, a mansion built by her grandfather in the Sheikh Jarrah area of Jerusalem. Al-Husseini went on to purchase two additional buildings and continued to take care of these children, and thousands more over the years, until she passed away in 1994. Her legacy lives on to this day, as Dar al-Tifel, or "the children's home," as it is better known, now has the capacity to board three hundred children, accepting only girls, either orphaned or from impoverished families, offering them shelter, education, food, sports, arts, and extracurricular activities. Its goals, according to its website, are: "Taking care of female Palestinian orphan and needy children, providing them with a good decent life. Establishing schools to teach and educate girls in addition to training them to be self-independent. Sponsoring extra curricular activities, establishing literary, scientific, and art clubs with sport activities towards developing their talents. Preserving the Arab and the Palestinian heritage and culture." In addition to Dar al-Tifel, Hind al-Husseini also established a school for social work and a women's college, which were later transferred to al-Quds University, as well as a museum and a cultural center.

Like many women of her generation, al-Husseini was also very active in a number of social organizations that evolved into more openly political[14] work as Palestine was catapulted into survival mode after the Nakba—the catastrophe that befell Palestinians with the creation of Israel. These organizations remained active as Israel tightened its grip on Palestinian lives and land. This uninterrupted activism by women who had an experiential understanding that no nation can be "free" until all its members, men and women, are free and equal, is beautifully depicted in Julia Bacha's documentary *Naila and the Uprising*. Bacha had not intentionally set out to make a feminist film, focused on women and gender dynamics, when she first decided to make a documentary about the First Intifada. Instead, she was primarily concerned with recording an important moment in Palestinian history that is frequently misrepresented. Her vision evolved as she conducted field research and interviewed participants in the grassroots movement. As Bacha writes in her director's notes, what she discovered was that women were instrumental in coordinating the popular social upheaval and often exploited Israeli society's own patriarchal assumptions to coordinate the uprising. Indeed, as one of the women in the documentary explains, women were less likely to be arrested after curfew

and less likely to be searched, so they could transport leaflets or cloth with which to stitch together Palestinian flags.[15] As the film's website explains, "While most images of the First Intifada paint an incomplete picture of stone-throwing young men front and center, this film tells the story that history overlooked—of an unbending, nonviolent women's movement at the head of Palestine's struggle for freedom."[16] The women in this uprising, still referred to as "the intifada of the stones," mobilized hundreds of thousands of civilians, ran mobile heath clinics, organized underground schools after Israel forcefully shut down Palestinian schools, and launched indigenous self-sustainability initiatives so as to allow Palestinians to boycott Israeli products.

Bacha writes:

> The First Intifada was not only a vibrant, strategic and sustained nonviolent civil resistance movement; for months, it was also led by a network of Palestinian women who were fighting a dual struggle for national liberation and gender equality. We knew we wanted to bring this story to light by producing a documentary that could provide insight and wisdom from the veteran women activists of the First Intifada to today's rising leaders…. From the First Intifada to the present moment, it's clear: women's leadership in civil society organizing is vital. But too often, their work is sidelined or ignored…. Women have consistently been a part of influential social movements coming out of the Middle East, but time and again, the cameras focus on armed men, leaving us with a narrative that not only erases women but also misrepresents the struggles themselves, as well as the demands behind those struggles.[17]

Just as the French colonizers had completely misunderstood Algerian women's contribution to the Algerian Revolution, assuming that those in "modern" (Western) dress could not possibly be anti-French, so the Israelis did not suspect that some of the "well-dressed" Palestinian women were also radical activists and organizers. Eventually, as more Palestinian men were arrested and/or deported, women took the helm of most social organizations, from prisoners' committees to community sustainability. These Palestinian women, the backbone of the First Intifada, had an incisive analysis of social norms and were intentional about resisting and challenging both Israel's violations of their human rights and their own society's restrictive gender roles. Today, along with the denunciation of the disastrous outcome of the Oslo Accords, which put an end to the First Intifada, there is a growing realization that the accords also dealt a serious blow to women's emancipation and the social gains they had achieved as

they led the grassroots social uprising. Bacha comments on that unfortunate development in the director's notes about *Naila and the Uprising:* "The film is also a cautionary tale for what happens when women are stripped of their leadership roles and excluded from ongoing struggles."[18]

Western feminists have been and remain quick to denounce the oppression of Arab women as a result of Islamic fundamentalism but not as a result of Israeli occupation, and they seem oblivious to the fact that occupation and militarism have gendered manifestations that aggravate women's circumstances in Palestine, as they would anywhere else. This is all the more surprising when these feminist scholars are eager to analyze the feminization of poverty in other war-ravaged countries, the disenfranchisement of women as military institutions hold sway over a society, the violence inflicted on sex workers and sexual slavery in war zones, and the overall increase in sexual violence in communities that have experienced armed conflict. When it comes to Israel, however, many Western feminists' critical analysis collapses into a reductionist binary that views Israel as "Western," "modern," "civilized," and Palestinians as "backward," and thus fails to grasp the gendered aspects of Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people. The myopic lens looks only at the micro-environment, namely Arab society, and completely overlooks the macro-environment, namely Israel's occupation. Yet, as many Palestinian feminists have documented over the past decades, Israel's violence is gendered, impacting women in multiple ways, from the denial of health and reproductive rights to sexual torture in prison. And, in what can only be viewed as an extreme stretch of the definition of "gay-friendly," Israel has also pressured queers in Gaza and the West Bank into collaborating with the occupiers by threatening to out them to their conservative families unless they spy on members of their own communities. And, of course, as psychological and physical torture are rampant in Israeli jails, so is sexual violence, including rape.

The documentary *Women in Struggle*, by Buthina Canaan Khoury, follows four Palestinian women political prisoners after their release from Israeli jail, as they narrate their experience in Israeli detention. One, Rasmea Odeh, was subjected to extreme torture and raped with a broomstick when her father, who was brought into the room with her and ordered to rape her, refused to do so. Forced to confess, Odeh was

sentenced to life in prison for allegedly detonating a bomb in a café that resulted in the death of two Israeli students. Following her release after ten years, as part of a larger prisoners' exchange, she emigrated to the US in 1995, obtained US citizenship in 2004, and became a cherished leader of the Arab American community in Chicago.

Catapulted into prominence by her struggle against a corrupt justice system that eventually stripped her of her citizenship and deported her on the basis of a confession made under torture, Odeh has become a symbol for millions of women who identify with aspects of her multifaceted experience.

Odeh represents today's organic, grassroots leader. Her credentials come from decades of community work, empowering immigrant women and building political community. A criminalized, marginalized Palestinian immigrant survivor of settler colonialism, militarism, imprisonment, and physical, sexual, and psychological torture, she exposed Israel as a racist occupier and colonizer to communities of immigrants, feminists, and Black and brown people she had organized alongside for decades.

Meanwhile, back in Palestine, one group that has done important work in addressing the multiple jeopardy of Palestinian women and queers generally is AlQaws for Gender Diversity and Sexual Diversity in Palestinian Society (*AlQaws* is Arabic for "rainbow"), under the leadership of Haneen Maikey. Grounded in the understanding that there is no separating the personal from the political—the same understanding articulated by Nawal El Saadawi at the 1985 International Conference on Women—AlQaws's statement on its political vision clarifies:

> Our work strategies and programs emerge directly from our field experience and careful analysis of the concrete local reality that shapes current social and cultural attitudes around sexual and gender diversity. For Palestinian society, all grassroots work is affected by Israeli colonialism and occupation. And, alQaws has been demonstrating for over a decade that all political work intersects with issues that are sometimes dismissed as too personal, apolitical, or irrelevant to anti-occupation and de-colonial organizing, such as homosexuality and queer identity, non-normative gender, and so on. In all of our work, we aim to expand our impact on our society through an ever-increasing circle of partners and supporters who adopt our vision, while standing firm in our beliefs and values. Our commitment to supporting and strengthening Palestinian queer/LGBT communities cannot be separated from our vision for a self-determined Palestinian society free from all forms of oppression.[19]

The multiple forms of oppression became clear in the summer of 2019, when in response to AlQaws announcing that it would be running a number of workshops for queer youth in the West Bank, the group came under attack by none other than Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas, who would not be in (symbolic) power himself were it not for the US and Israel.[20]

Earlier that summer, a young Palestinian had been severely stabbed in Tel Aviv by his own brother over suspicions about his sexuality. And shortly thereafter, the entire world heard the screams of the young Israa Ghrayeb as she was being beaten to death by her own family members, murdered for having gone to a café with her fiancé, not yet husband.[21]

These horrific incidents were loudly denounced by Palestinians within Palestine itself, who took to the streets in protests carrying signs proclaiming that "Patriarchy Kills" and "There is no honor in honor crimes." Hundreds also joined protests specifically against homophobia, with signs highlighting that Palestinian queers should not have to take refuge in their occupier's gay-friendly Tel Aviv to avoid their own society's homophobia. Indeed, the popular outrage at the stabbing of the gay teenager and the murder of Israa Ghrayeb are indicative of the progress made within Palestinian society. The protests, and the nascent Tal'at movement,[22] are indicative of a widespread understanding that patriarchy is oppressive, even murderous, rather than "part of our traditions," and that it must be overthrown if Palestinian society is to be a healthy resilient one. Simply, we would not be where we are now—survivors, leaders, organizers—were it not for our Palestinian mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers, who have upheld Palestinian society for the better part of a century, against tremendous odds from both within and without.

The memory of Razan Najjar is a reminder of this. On June 1, 2018, Razan was shot by an Israeli sniper while she tended to wounded protesters participating in the Great March of Return in Gaza. Razan was a paramedic, yet Israeli snipers still targeted her despite her visible white coat. Weeks before she was murdered, she explained to a *New York Times* journalist what made her go out day after day, knowing snipers were shooting indiscriminately: "In our society women are often judged.... But society has to accept us. If they don't want to accept us by choice, they will be forced to accept us because we have more strength than any man."

Today, Palestinian women and queers cross geographic, social, and gender borders as they proudly stand front and center in progressive causes everywhere, just as Palestine itself is finally understood as a progressive, decolonial, indigenous, feminist, and queer issue. And while it is only right that this understanding of the multiple jeopardy facing Palestinian women and queers comes from within these communities themselves, in the homeland as well as the diaspora, it is time for allies globally to also grasp that our circumstances can only be addressed through an anticolonial approach, free of imperialist feminism and Islamophobia.



9

Cops Here, Bombs There

Black–Palestinian Solidarity

Khury Petersen-Smith

August 2014 came during a cruel summer for Palestinians and for Black people in the United States. In Palestine, Israel followed its 2008–2009 bombardment of Gaza, which left over 1,400 Palestinians killed, with another round of punishment in 2014. Having imposed a blockade that denied residents of Gaza the most basic elements of contemporary society, like paper and medicine, and goods that people around the world enjoy each day for simple pleasures, like chocolate, Israelis directed their ingenuity at severing Gaza from the rest of the world and making life there unbearable. Hamas had won elections in Gaza in 2006, and Israeli "democracy" responded—using the control of Gaza's borders that it shared with Egypt—by producing a situation intended to provoke Palestinians there to revolt against the party and to make them suffer in the meantime.

Then came the 2014 assault. Called the 2014 Gaza War or "Operation Protective Edge" by the Israelis, the disparity in deaths betrays the one-sidedness of the violence. More than two thousand Palestinians were killed, primarily civilians. In contrast, seventy-three Israelis were killed, sixty-seven of whom were soldiers. There are unfortunately many chapters of Israeli mercilessness in Palestinian history. But the summer of 2014 will be remembered by many as one of slaughtered Palestinian children. Israel killed more than five hundred children in the seven weeks of the assault.

That same summer opened with four New York City police officers strangling to death an unarmed Black man, Eric Garner, in the heat of a Staten Island day. Garner's tragic final words, "I can't breathe," became known to Black people across the US, repeated at rallies against police violence and printed on T-shirts and protest signs. His murder was caught on cell phone video and viewed countless times—one of the earlier examples of what would become an unceasing flood of bystander footage capturing police and security guard brutality against Black people in cities across the country.

On August 9, 2014, a white police officer in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson, Missouri, shot and killed an unarmed Black teenager named Michael Brown. "Hands up, don't shoot" became a rallying cry in the weeks and years that followed. When Brown's family and other Ferguson residents assembled in a pained, angry, but nonviolent gathering to remember their loved one and to denounce racist police violence, local authorities responded by deploying four police departments, including Missouri state troopers. Black residents rebelled, and the state ultimately mobilized the National Guard to quell the unrest.

For two weeks that August, the Israeli bombing of Gaza and the uprising in Ferguson were happening at the same time. People across the US could turn on the news and see plumes of smoke rising from Gaza's neighborhoods bombed by Israeli jets, followed by clouds of tear gas fired by American police and soldiers in Ferguson. One could read as coincidence that two subject populations—Palestinians in Palestine and Black people in the US—were besieged at the same time. But when entire societies, political and legal regimes, are constructed over years to maintain the domination of a population—as is the case with these two—there is no such thing as coincidence.

Attentive activists knew this. From the early days of the protests in Ferguson, Palestinians had a visible presence in the streets, marching alongside Black rebels. Palestinians in Palestine took to social media during the Ferguson rebellion with words of encouragement and advice about how to deal with tear gas. A group of Palestinian activists in Palestine and the diaspora issued a statement of solidarity on the *Electronic Intifada* website, and the Palestinian BDS National Committee also wrote a statement in solidarity with the uprising. In response to the repressive violence unleashed in Ferguson, the BDS National Committee wrote, "We recognize those tactics being used in Ferguson and the mentality behind them."[1]

"Michael's death has been met with outrage and anger among the people of Palestine struggling for freedom, justice and equality," the statement continued. "We strongly believe that the oppressed of the world must stand united in the face of racism, racial repression and injustice. Together we can prevail. Together we shall prevail."

In the US, the time before the 2014 attack on Gaza and the Ferguson Uprising saw a small but significant group of Black public intellectuals calling attention to the oppression of Palestinians. Academics Angela Davis and Cornel West were among them. *Ebony* magazine, the historic Black American publication, ran articles about why Black people should stand with Palestinians.[2] But the August 2014 moment—and the year that followed—constituted a breakthrough. That year saw an explosion of resistance under the banner of Black Lives Matter, a phrase coined a year earlier by activists Opal Tometi, Alicia Garza, and Patrisse Cullors in response to the murder of a thirteen-year-old Black child, Trayvon Martin, by a racist vigilante in Florida. The decisions of grand juries to not indict the officer who murdered Michael Brown or the officers who murdered Eric Garner—decisions that took place in the same week—sparked the nationwide protests, which burned for months.

The following year was also a watershed for solidarity between the Black struggle in the US and the fight for Palestinian freedom. While delegations of activists from around the world to Palestine had long been a way for people to learn about the Palestinian situation and show solidarity, that year saw more delegations of Black activists from the United States. Such groups included the Dream Defenders, whose first delegation was in 2015. The Dream Defenders was founded in Miami, Florida, in response to

the murder of Trayvon Martin, and they organized campaigns against systematic racism. Their 2015 delegation was part of developing a focus on Palestine solidarity as a central aspect of the organization's work. The delegation also included activists from Ferguson and members of Black Youth Project 100,[3] a key organization in the Movement for Black Lives, a coalition of groups drawn together by the Black Lives Matter struggle.

That August, activists released the "2015 Black Solidarity With Palestine" statement, signed by more than a thousand Black activists, artists, and intellectuals. The statement, which was published on *Ebony's* website, expressed a culmination of the previous year's learning and activities. A year later saw another milestone with the publication of the *Vision For Black Lives*, drafted by activists in the Movement for Black Lives. A political platform, the *Vision*, also represented a culmination of thinking on a range of topics by Black activists, including the historic demand for reparations, resisting criminalization, and solidarity with Palestine. The document referred to Israel's endless war on the Palestinians as a genocide and called for the end of US aid to Israel.[4]

The 2014–16 moment was a wave of Black–Palestine solidarity, but it was not the first. In visiting Palestine, writing words of solidarity, and joining Palestinians in the streets, Black activists in the twenty-first century were revisiting an historic relationship with deep roots. The Black Power era of the 1960s and '70s was the context for the previous high-water mark of Black–Palestinian solidarity. It is not coincidental that these points of radical clarity regarding anti-Black racism and militant activity against it by Black activists produced learning and solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. The tendency for high points of Black struggle in the US has been toward internationalism. Moreover, given the central place that the Palestinian freedom struggle held in the mid-twentieth-century era of decolonization, Black Power militancy found an affinity with the Palestinian struggle in particular.

Black–Palestine solidarity in the 1960s

As Alex Lubin has noted, there are histories of affinities toward Palestine and imagined geographies of liberation among Black Americans that stretch back at least to the nineteenth century.[5] Such longings were shaped by a

combination of the political situation and social realities of Black people in the United States and Black Christian traditions' orientations toward Palestine as a holy land.

Black Christian denominations, however, were not the only religious traditions in the Black community with a political outlook toward the Middle East. The Nation of Islam (NOI) of the 1950s and '60s was another context for Black Americans to imagine the Middle East as a site of struggle and freedom. The political perspective of the NOI was shaped by founder Wallace Fard Muhammad's interpretation of Islam and that of his successor, Elijah Muhammad, as well as a Black nationalist politics. The worldview involved both a religious orientation on the Middle East as the location of Mecca and a political orientation that was inspired by Arab nationalism. The NOI took particular inspiration from Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt, both as a center of Arab nationalism and because of a sense of lineage connecting the ancient Egyptian civilization with the contemporary Black American population. The NOI's publications reported on Egypt in the 1950s, and in particular on Nasser's effort to nationalize the Suez Canal[6]—which Israel, France, and Britain responded to with military invasion. This was the NOI in which Malcolm X developed his international outlook and became a leader.

In 1957, Malcolm organized a meeting on decolonization with representatives from the governments of Egypt, Sudan, Ghana, Iraq, and Morocco.[7] Activities like these, and his speeches at the time, indicate that Malcolm X took great inspiration from the 1955 Bandung Conference of representatives from newly independent states in Asia and Africa and from decolonization movements in the Arab world and Africa in particular. In his 1963 Detroit speech "Message to the Grassroots," Malcolm says, "Once you study what happened at the Bandung Conference, and the results of the Bandung Conference, it actually serves as a model for the same procedure you and I can use to get our problems solved." He continues, regarding the participants of the conference:

> They began to recognize who their enemy was. The same man that was colonizing our people in Kenya was colonizing our people in the Congo. The same one in the Congo was colonizing our people in South Africa, and in Southern Rhodesia, and in Burma, and in India, and in Afghanistan, and in Pakistan. They realized all over the world where the dark man was being oppressed, he was being oppressed by the white man; where the dark man

was being exploited, he was being exploited by the white man. So they got together on this basis—that they had a common enemy.[8]

It was with this perspective that Malcolm X came to learn about Palestine. He visited Palestine—briefly traveling to East Jerusalem—on a 1959 trip to the Middle East, between the beginning of his journey in Egypt, meeting with officials from Nasser's government, and the end in Saudi Arabia. He made another brief visit to Palestine in 1964, again stopping between other parts of his journey, this time to Gaza.

Palestine gets an incidental mention in Malcolm X's autobiography. In a passage whose main focus is on the dangers of assimilation for marginalized groups, he writes somewhat tangentially that the British helped "wrest Palestine away from the Arabs, the rightful owners."[9]

But Malcolm wrote more directly about Israel elsewhere. In his 1964 article "Zionist Logic," in Cairo's *Egyptian Gazette*, he writes, "the ever-scheming European imperialists wisely placed Israel where she could geographically divide the Arab world, infiltrate and sow the seed of dissension among African leaders and also divide the Africans against the Asians."[10]

Malcolm X's perception of the Israeli colonization of Palestine was likely informed by his understanding of race relations involving Black people and Jews in the United States.[11] These included fraught power relationships of Jewish landlords and business owners exploiting Black people. Some of his commentary on Jews and Israel sees Jews as monolithic and has hints of antisemitic tropes regarding Jews, money, and power.[12] The predominant perspective that framed Malcolm X's outlook on Palestine, however, was one of anticolonialism and Third World nationalism.

The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the legendary organization that grew out of the 1960 wave of sit-ins against Jim Crow segregation in the US South, also confronted Israel and US support for it. In August 1967, SNCC issued a paper titled "The Middle East Crisis," which opens with an acknowledgement of the Jewish Holocaust as "one of the worst crimes against humanity," and then presents a history of the British and Israeli colonization. Published just two months after the

1967 War, the paper contains nuance for its two-page brevity. It acknowledges, for example, not only the dispossession and siege of Palestinians but also racist discrimination against Arab Jews by Israel.[13] It also points to the silencing of Jewish critics of Israel. The paper unfortunately refers to the European Rothschilds, attributing outsized credit to the family in the establishment of Israel and repeating an allusion to common antisemitic conspiracy theories in the process. But the overall framing of Israel and the struggle for Palestine in the context of colonization and the Third World revolt against it is evident in the conclusion:

> In the Middle East, America has worked with the powerful organized Zionist movement to take over another people's home and to replace these people with a partner who has well served America's purpose, a partner that can help the United States and other white Western countries to exploit and control the nations of the Middle East and Africa![14]

It makes sense that Black radicals in the United States came to solidarity with Palestine in the context of decolonization throughout Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Many saw the Black freedom struggle in the US in relationship to that context. In the same year that SNCC issued its statement on Palestine, members of the organization participated in the International Seminar on Apartheid, Racial Discrimination, and Colonialism in Southern Africa, which took place in Lusaka, Zambia. At the gathering, SNCC issued a position paper declaring that "Afro-Americans have watched with sympathy and concern the struggle against apartheid and white settler domination in eastern and southern Africa over the past twenty years." They continued, emphasizing the centrality of an internationalist outlook to their struggle: "As the vanguard of the struggle against racism in America, SNCC is not unfamiliar with the problems of southern Africa."[15]

SNCC activists wrote these words a year after formally coming out against the US war in Vietnam. SNCC may have been the vanguard of the Black freedom struggle, but they were not singular or unique in their understanding of that struggle in a global context. Rather, SNCC's internationalism was expressive of a wider sentiment within the Black freedom struggle. While many Americans learn at least some of the words of civil rights leader Martin Luther King's iconic "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered at the 1963 March on Washington, less attention goes to his

powerful "Letter from Birmingham Jail," which was published in the same year. In it, King sees the fight against Jim Crow and the centuries-long oppression of Black people in the US in a global context, and contrasts the progress of anticolonial efforts around the world with the obstinate defense of the racist status quo by the American power structure. He writes with frustration, "We have waited for more than three hundred and forty years for our God-given and constitutional rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward the goal of political independence, and we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter."[16] Indeed, King not only took inspiration from Third World decolonization at a distance. He joined Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah and other anti-colonial leaders at the inauguration of the independence of the African nation in its capital Accra on March 6, 1957.[17] Black leaders like King and Malcolm X—and countless others alongside them—saw the Black freedom struggle in the United States as part of a transnational struggle of people resisting racism and colonialism.

The anticolonial struggles and newly independent, formerly colonized nations that so inspired Malcolm X in their gathering at Bandung and in their pursuit of new, nationalist governments and programs, stood as part of a global backdrop to the Black freedom struggle in the US. Decolonization around the world inspired and set the bar for Black rebels in the United States to reach.

An internationalist consciousness then, for many Black militants, was part and parcel of a radical Black consciousness. Black Panther Assata Shakur in her narration of her own radicalization in her memoir *Assata*, writes that "any community seriously concerned with its own freedom has to be concerned with other peoples' freedom as well. The victory of oppressed people anywhere in the world is a victory for Black people. Each time one of imperialism's tentacles is cut off we are closer to liberation."

This understanding not only led Black revolutionaries to internationalism, it also led them to convince others of its importance. Emory Douglas, the artist, Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party (BPP) and the designer of its newspaper, *The Black Panther*, spoke in a 2016 interview about the mission of the paper. When asked why *The Black Panther* had an international section and why it highlighted the struggles of Indigenous peoples, Chicanx and Latinx people in the US, and people

resisting colonization around the world, Douglas responded, "They were oppressed, just like we were here. That's the essence of it. And we were a resistance movement. So in that context, you're always in solidarity with those who are like you."[18]

The Palestinian liberation struggle occupied a special place in the Third World revolt unfolding and inspiring Black radicals in the US. A statement published by the Committee of Black Americans for Truth in the Middle-East in the *New York Times* on November 1, 1970, highlights that role: "WE STATE that the Palestinian Revolution is the vanguard of the Arab Revolution and is part of the anti-colonial revolution which is going on in places such as Vietnam, Mozambique, Angola, Brazil, Laos, South Africa, and Zimbabwe."[19] The statement, titled "An Appeal by Black Americans Against United States Support of the Zionist Government of Israel," communicates not only a broad framing of the Palestinian struggle as part of the broader fight for Third World freedom but also a rich understanding of the condition and resistance of Palestinians, informed by detailed knowledge of the Palestinian resistance movement and close observation of it and responses to it. The statement refers to the 1967 War between Israel, the Palestinians, and neighboring Arab states—a pivotal moment that impacted many of the Black radicals who came to solidarity with Palestine. But its more immediate inspiration came from the siege by the Jordanian military of Palestinians within that country, known as Black September. The writers of the statement also draw parallels between US and Israeli societies, finding resonance in the condition of Black and colonized peoples in the US, and both Palestinians and Arab Jews under Israeli rule, writing: "WE STATE that the exploitation experienced by Afro-Americans, Native Americans (Indians), Puerto Ricans, and Chicanos (Mexican-Americans) is similar to the exploitation of Palestinian Arabs and Oriental Jews by the Zionist State of Israel."

The Black Panther Party of Assata Shakur and Emory Douglas is perhaps the organization of its era best known regarding solidarity between the Black and Palestinian struggles. The Panthers proclaimed in their 1970 statement regarding Palestine, "We support the Palestinians' just struggle for liberation one hundred percent. We will go on doing this, and we would like for all of the progressive people of the world to join in our ranks in order to make a world in which all people can live."

The Panthers' relationship with the Palestinian struggle was not oneway. The Black liberation struggle in the US had a powerful impact, inspiring movements from the Irish civil rights struggle to Okinawan rebels against US militarization and Japanese colonialism in their Pacific home.[20] Indigenous peoples of Australia formed an organization in 1971 called the Black Panthers, which was affiliated with the BPP in the US. Such was also the case with the Polynesian Panthers in Aoteroa (the indigenous Maori name for the islands also known as New Zealand), the Dalit Panthers of India, and indeed, the Israeli Black Panthers, whose membership were Arab Jews facing discrimination in a state where white nationalism and European colonialism had served as models since its origins.

As with so many other peoples in revolt at the time, the relationship of Palestinians to Black Power activists, and the Panthers in particular, was a mutual one. Those relations were not just from a distance; they were cemented at particular sites. One was the BPP's Foreign Office in Algiers. The North African capital served as a hub for revolutionary representatives from decolonizing movements around the world. As Bouchra Khalili notes, the various foreign offices of revolutionary organizations and embassies of postcolonial governments constituted an "archipelago" of bureaus in which militants from the Third World and oppressed populations in the West moved between "islands" of radical spaces and conversations.[21] Revolutionaries from Angola, Guinea, Cape Verde, Portugal, and Palestine elsewhere conferred and mingled. In this setting, the BPP had extensive contact with Palestinian revolutionaries. BPP chairman Huey Newton and other Panthers also visited Palestinians, both in Palestine and in refugee camps in the region.

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers, an organization of Black labor militants whose project fused the politics of the Black Power movement with the socialist vision of seizing the means of production, also held a commitment to Palestinian freedom. As with the Panthers and other contemporaries, League members' solidarity with Palestine was rooted in a broader internationalist outlook. The League emerged from the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM), an organization of revolutionary Black auto workers in Detroit who sought to spark a workers' revolution by organizing in what was then the linchpin of US capitalism: Michigan's auto industry. Formed by longtime, seasoned revolutionaries, DRUM recognized

the industrial intersection that auto manufacturing represented—with the steel, rubber, and other industries connected to it. They also seized upon the location of Black workers within the production process, as they were super-exploited on the assembly line, subject to racist harassment and discrimination in the factories, but possessing an outsized power relative to their numbers. As an issue of the *South End*, Wayne State University's newspaper—which was effectively taken over by DRUM and turned into a revolutionary publication—argued, "DRUM's scope is not limited to the oppressive situation at Chrysler, nor all the plants for that matter. Although most organizing activity will be in the plants, DRUM sees its long-range goal as the complete and total social transformation of society. This will take the effort of the whole Black community as well as other progressive sectors of society."

The outlook of the leaders of DRUM was as internationalist as it was strategic. In *Finally Got the News*, a documentary film featuring members of DRUM, founding member and leader Ken Cockrel describes the capitalist enemy that the workers in Detroit face, someone whose labor is parasitic rather than productive and whose reach extends well beyond the borders of the United States. "He owns and controls and therefore receives the benefit from," Cockrel says. "That's what they call profit. He's fucking with shit in Bolivia, he's fucking with shit in Chile, he's Anaconda, he's United Fruit, he's in mining. He ain't never in his life produced shit!" DRUM also devoted an issue of the *South End* to the Greek revolt unfolding against that country's military junta in the late 1960s and 70s.[22]

As a center of Black foment in the Black Power era, and the home to a large population of Arab Americans—also shaped, inspired, and intimately related with the Third World revolt—Detroit was a site of learning about Arab anticolonial revolt in particular. In 1968, DRUM collaborated with Arab and other activists to organize a screening of *The Battle of Algiers*, the anticolonial classic film about the Algerian Revolution. The organizers sold six hundred tickets, packing the theater—which erupted in applause whenever the Arab rebels struck a blow against the French colonizers.[23]

DRUM and the League then took up the cause of Palestinian freedom both informed by their anti-imperialist consciousness and their proximity to Arab militants with whom they sought solidarity. The organization used the *South End* to educate its readership and agitate in support of the Palestinian

struggle. Between 1967 and '69, the newspaper ran several letters to the editor and articles by members of the Organization of Arab Students (OAS) about Palestine and the Third World revolt.[24] While DRUM faced repression throughout its short history, it was the decision of the *South End* to editorialize in support of Palestinian rights that led to the administration of Wayne State University to try to expel the organization from the campus and take away its control of the newspaper. Following an editorial sympathetic to the Palestinian resistance organization Fateh, university president William Keast accused the paper of antisemitism "reminiscent of Hitler's Germany."[25] While members of DRUM made it clear that they were not antisemitic, the newspaper continued to publish pro-Palestine articles.

Writing from members of OAS in the *South End* was one example of the collaborations between Arab radicals and the League in Detroit. The *South End* promoted and cosponsored protests against Israeli leaders Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Rabin when they made appearances in Detroit. OAS members sometimes gave talks at League meetings and brought Palestinian leaders, such as members of Fateh, to meet League members when they visited from the Middle East. And OAS members occasionally joined the League in their own work, as when leader Nabeel Abraham distributed DRUM pamphlets with the organization outside of the Dodge Main Plant.[26]

Conclusion: The hopeful present

The wave of Black–Palestine solidarity that rose in 2014 continues to build at the end of the decade. Activists in cities across the country are organizing campaigns to call attention to the consistent parallels between the oppression and resistance of Black Americans and Palestinians in Palestine. These include efforts to expose and disrupt US local police departments' collaborations with Israeli security forces, such as Jewish Voice for Peace's Deadly Exchange campaign. In April 2018, such organizing led the city council of Durham, North Carolina, to vote unanimously to ban the city's law enforcement from working with Israel. Similarly, activists in the United States work to connect crises facing predominantly Black residents, such as the struggle to access drinkable water in cities like Michigan's Flint and

Detroit, with Israel's denial of water to Palestinians in Gaza, and Palestinians in Palestine do the same.[27]

Moreover, Black public intellectuals continue to call attention to Palestinian oppression and draw parallels with Black oppression in the US in high-profile ways. On November 28, 2018, Black academic Marc Lamont Hill spoke at the annual commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People at the United Nations. The day after Hill's speech, in which he called for solidarity with the struggle to free Palestine "from the river to the sea," CNN fired Hill from his position as a commentator on the news network. CNN's reaction drew more attention to Hill's speech and gave him a larger platform to discuss its content. "There's no way that Black folk can be free if there's folk on the continent who are unfree, in Latin America who are unfree, or in Palestine who are unfree, because we're all oppressed by the same system," Hill explained on the popular hip-hop morning show *The Breakfast Club*, which invited him to talk about the speech and his firing.[28]

This dynamic, in which a prominent Black public intellectual took a highly visible stand in solidarity with Palestine, paid a price for it, and the subsequent Zionist reaction opened more space to discuss Palestine solidarity, was repeated. In January 2019, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute announced that it was rescinding the Fred Shuttlesworth Award that it had been scheduled to honor Angela Davis with the following month. The news organization Al.com found through investigation that the Civil Rights Institute's decision came after pressure from the Birmingham Holocaust Center, pointing to Davis's Palestine solidarity activism.[29]

Instead of casting a shadow on Davis, however, the Civil Rights Institute's decision led to public condemnation of the organization itself. Birmingham's city council unanimously adopted a resolution "recognizing the life work of Angela Davis" in response to the rescinding, and the chair, vice chair, and secretary of the institute's board all resigned in protest of the decision. Davis reaffirmed her solidarity with Palestine in interviews with media following the incident, and Birmingham activists organized a celebration of her work to take place instead of the derailed awards ceremony.

In the same month, antiracist legal scholar and author of the book *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander, took the opportunity on Martin Luther King Day to argue that she was inspired by King's controversial decision to denounce the US war in Vietnam to declare her solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. In a column Alexander published in the *New York Times* entitled "Time to Break the Silence on Palestine," she said that the same commitment to moral and political integrity that led King to take his 1967 stand compelled her to advocate for the rights of Palestinians, despite the costs that come with doing so. "I aim to speak with great courage and conviction" about the cause of Palestine, she writes, because "my conscience leaves me no choice."[30]

Perhaps the most visible face of Black solidarity with Palestine, however, is progressive Minnesota Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, who, in the first session of her first term in office, repeatedly called attention to Israeli abuses, US support for them, and the power of the pro-Israel lobby in Washington. Zionists, led by President Trump, have responded with vitriolic attacks on Omar, smearing her as antisemitic and drawing on Islamophobic tropes that portray antisemitism as intrinsic to the Muslim community. Even the leadership of Omar's own Democratic Party has condemned her comments as antisemitic, with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer drafting a resolution condemning antisemitism, which was directed at Omar. That effort failed, though, because of public support for Omar, and the language of the resolution was broadened to include other forms of bigotry.[31]

Despite the hostile responses, Omar has persisted and turned the attacks on her for her solidarity with Palestine into opportunities to speak further on the subject. After Israel, at President Trump's suggestion, denied Omar and her colleague Palestinian American Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib access to Palestine for a congressional delegation, Omar shared the would-be itinerary of their trip on Twitter.[32] The post highlighted recent Israeli abuses as well as solidarity efforts by Palestinian and Israeli activists.

These high-profile exchanges, in which Black public figures declare and promote solidarity with Palestine, are adding to the context in which growing numbers of people question US and Israeli dominant perspectives and find affinity with the Palestinian struggle. While there is a longstanding set of conversations regarding the connections between Black and

Palestinian perspectives in particular, the Black–Palestine solidarity nexus is increasingly becoming a point of reference for activists—Black, Palestinian, and of other backgrounds.

Like the waves of Black revolt before it, the 2020 Black-led uprisings in US cities, sparked by the strangulation of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers, opened a new chapter both in the Black freedom struggle and in Black–Palestine solidarity. That wave has been impactful in its own right, as it has called greater attention to the plight of Black women—such as Breonna Taylor, who was murdered in Louisville weeks prior to Floyd's murder—and launched a mainstream conversation about the defunding and abolishing of the police while also reviving a conversation about slavery and historic racism. These uprisings were also truly transnational, with protesters across Europe defacing and toppling statues of men involved in colonialism and the slave trade, and activists from France to Australia marching to demand justice for Floyd and Taylor, as well as local victims of racist police violence.

In Palestine, activists made connections between the murder of Floyd and that of Iyad Halek, a Palestinian man with autism whom Israeli police had killed in Jerusalem just days before. Beyond the straightforward parallels, even deeper conversations unfolded. The fact that the convenience store that called the police on Floyd was owned by Palestinians sparked an interrogation within Palestinian–American communities of their location in US society and relationship to the Black population. More than anything, the rebellions reoriented Palestinian activists as it refocused all politics in the US. Palestinians and solidarity activists renewed their commitments to supporting the Black freedom struggle, both because Black liberation in its own right deserves solidarity and because of the implications of Black resistance for other oppressed people the world over. As Kristian Davis Bailey wrote, "The greatest internal threat to the US empire is that of a Black revolution."[33]

The Black radical tradition calls attention to the anti-Black racism essential to US society and casts doubt on the compatibility of Black freedom and the United States project. After all, the Black presence in what is now called the United States, beginning with the trans-Atlantic slave trade, spans nearly five hundred years. And yet the Black American population has yet to experience civil equality in US society. Instead, it

remains bound by deep and systemic racism, described by Ruth Wilson Gilmore as the “fatal couplings of power and difference.”[34]

Similarly, the prospect of Palestinian freedom explodes the notion of Israeli democracy, showing over the course of the Zionist project that the most basic rights for Palestinians—such as that to return to the homes from which they were expelled—are incompatible with it. The Black–Palestinian intersection then is a powerful one, pointing necessarily to deep critiques of US and Israeli societies and politics, and the transnational systems of power in which they are embedded, leading those who engage with it to revolutionary conclusions regarding both countries and beyond. That intersection is generative and is serving a powerful role in the education and radicalization of a new generation of revolutionaries, as it has in the past.

Previous waves of Black–Palestine solidarity pointed to broader, liberatory, socialist projects. The Black American radicals and organizations referenced in this chapter had a range of political perspectives. But they shared outlooks that framed their actions in the Black freedom movement in the US in the context of decolonizing struggles targeting American capitalism and Western imperialism. Similarly, Palestine and its region in the 1960s and ’70s saw the flourishing of the Palestinian socialist movement. And in the Third World revolt of that time—with sites of socialist experimentation all over the world—the struggle for Palestinian liberation and the Black freedom struggle in the US had special places as especially incendiary and inspiring revolts against nakedly racist and colonial projects.

The central places of the Israeli state and of US empire in global capitalism and imperialism have only matured and become more entrenched since that time. As we see the reemergence of Black–Palestine solidarity, drawing on powerful histories and generating new understandings and outlooks, the challenge of developing revolutionary visions of liberation for Palestine, Black America, and all oppressed people remains critical.



CONCLUSION

"Revolution Until Victory"

Sumaya Awad & brian bean

This collection of essays has attempted to introduce Palestine and the Palestinian struggle from the perspective of twelve thinkers and activists. We provide an overview of some of these key questions from the movement rather than produce an exhaustive guide to Palestine or Palestinian socialist thought. We are putting forth an argument that sees socialist ideas as the underlying foundation we must rely on in shaping the future of the Palestine movement both in the US and on the ground in Palestine and the wider region.

In conclusion, we offer a summary of some core perspectives that have informed the general orientation of the book. These perspectives pertain to three key areas: the situation on the ground in Palestine, the political context in the Middle East and North Africa, and the state of the movement in the US. Finally, we close with an argument for an alternative vision for the future.

Palestine: Crisis and fragmentation

For Palestinians, the reality of life under occupation has reached a breaking point, just as it has many dozens of times before. Walking through the streets of Jerusalem, Hebron, or Gaza City today, one senses the lingering feeling of struggle and the bitter aftertaste of repression. Israel's settler-colonial project aims to fragment, isolate, and expel Palestinian communities. Facing the stifling oppression of occupation carried out both by Israeli forces and the Palestinian Authority's own police, youth in the Balata refugee camp recently declared: "We hate all politicians and their empty words. Our leaders are powerless; we know we never will return [to our places of origin]. The national project is dead. The only thing that is left is surviving."[1]

The threat of yet another mass Palestinian expulsion looms on the horizon. In the last three years, Israel has taken dramatic steps to further entrench its apartheid regime. The Nation-State Law passed in 2018 strips Palestinians of their right to self-determination and downgrades all aspects of Palestinian identity—from the Arabic language to the right of Palestinians to narrate their own history. The deportation of human rights activists and journalists and the barring of US congresswomen, activists, and monitoring groups from entering the country all point to the fact that Israel is no longer even attempting to mask its racist agenda behind illusions of democracy.

The US government, too, has abandoned the veneer of neutrality and, at a time when the mainstream is becoming more suspicious if not wholly distrustful of Israel, enthusiastically embraced Israel's increasingly tyrannical actions. Trump's decision to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and shutter the offices of the PLO in Washington drove the last nails into the coffin of the so-called peace process. In Palestine, the Trump administration cut aid to the Palestinian Authority, halted support to local hospitals, and defunded the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), sharpening the human catastrophe in Gaza. The recent US efforts to strip the descendants of those expelled from Palestine during the Nakba of their status as refugees is a frontal assault on the possibility of the right of return. In November 2019, the Trump White House officially recognized Israel's illegal settlements in the West Bank, turning the

longstanding de facto US support for settlement expansion into brazen state policy.

Although Trump has enshrined a new hostility toward Palestinians, his actions would not have been possible without the precedent set by the Obama administration. During Obama's eight years in office, the US stood by Israel as it carried out three separate bombing campaigns in Gaza and increased US funding for the Israeli military. This legacy of staunch American backing has enabled Israel to pursue its policy of occupation more aggressively and created space for Netanyahu and Israel's political parties to bring the question of West Bank annexation back to the fore. The trajectory of unyielding opposition to Palestinian sovereignty, which has developed over the course of many decades and been taken to new extremes under Trump, is firmly locked into US foreign policy and cannot easily be undone.[2]

Against this backdrop, the situation facing Palestinians on the ground has only become more precarious. Jewish settlers wreak havoc on Palestinian towns on a weekly basis, defacing homes and schools, and burning down acres upon acres of olive groves. In 2018, the number of reported hate crimes targeting Palestinians in the occupied West Bank tripled compared to the previous year. Between 2016 and 2019, more than thirty thousand settlement homes were approved for construction on Palestinian land. All the while, hundreds of Palestinians lost their homes to demolitions and forced evictions.

A few miles away in Jerusalem, Palestinians continue to be denied the right to vote and the right to buy land or build on land they own. Palestinians in Jerusalem live in a segregated society that discriminates against them at every turn. In East Jerusalem, Palestinians make up 40 percent of the population yet are confined to only 8 percent of the urban land. Home demolitions in East Jerusalem are proceeding at a record pace; whole neighborhoods continue to be razed in a process of ethnic cleansing designed to rid the symbolic city of its Palestinian identity.[3] Entire Palestinian villages in the Naqab face a similar fate. This is all made possible with the assistance of US military aid—$138.5 billion as of 2019.

In the West Bank, Palestinians are subjected to an "occupation economy" dictated by the Israeli occupation. Palestinians are forced to pay taxes to Israel only to have that same money fund the military machine that

oppresses them. Since 1997, Israel has withheld a combined four years' worth of tax revenues from the West Bank, revenues used to pay salaries to Palestinian public employees who make up 20 percent of the workforce. Israel controls all imports and exports, restricting the Palestinian Authority's ability to set fiscal policy. Between 2000 and 2017, the Palestinian economy lost an estimated $48 billion as a result of Israel's occupation. These measures paired with the near complete control of Palestinian movement throughout most of the occupied West Bank has led to a 56 percent poverty rate and official unemployment over 15 percent.[4] Israel's occupation fragments Palestinian communities between the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel behind the Green Line.

Gaza has borne the brunt of this isolation. Gaza today is an open-air, maximum-security prison with more than two million Palestinians who have been besieged by land, sea, and air for over a decade. Heavy artillery, mines, and tanks dot the enclave's barrier with Israel. To the west is the Mediterranean, guarded by Israeli gunboats that limit Palestinian access to the sea for commerce or travel. Gaza has suffered repeated Israeli land and air bombardments since 2005. A few months after Jewish settlers were resettled from Gaza into the occupied West Bank and Israel, Operation First Rain commenced with a barrage of missiles. Israeli military assaults on Gaza continued over the next decade, each one rivaling the former in aggression. During Israel's fifty-one-day war on Gaza in 2014, more than 2,000 Palestinians were killed, a staggering 495 of them children. The periodic assaults on Gaza, coupled with the ongoing siege, have destroyed the enclave's infrastructure and economy. The local population lacks the resources to meet their basic needs and are prevented from entering and exiting by both Israeli and Egyptian authorities. Even permits to access medical treatment are rarely granted, and cases of children leaving Gaza for life-threatening medical surgeries without a parent or guardian are not uncommon. High unemployment rates (40 percent) burden an overwhelmingly young population—50 percent of Palestinians in Gaza are below the age of twenty-five. Rates of diagnosable post-traumatic stress disorder reach as high as 70 percent among young people, according to some studies.[5]

Still, against all odds, there have been numerous efforts by Palestinians—from Gaza and the West Bank to Israel and Lebanon—to break out of

their fragmentation. In Gaza, the Great March of Return (GMR) in 2018–19 brought Palestinian demands for justice and unification to the international stage. The nearly two-year long March of Return was in part inspired by the regional uprisings of 2011.[6] The courage and resilience of the initial wave of demonstrations of the March of Return drew a sharp distinction from previous years of top-down directives heralded by political factions. Instead, the grassroots character of GMR evoked the from-below upsurge of other high points of the Palestinian struggle (the Great Revolt of 1936–39 and the First and Second Intifadas). Shortly after, the July general strike of Palestinian workers in Lebanon exposed the ongoing subordination of Palestinian refugees to second-class status.[7] In 2019, Palestinian women launched the Tal'at Movement,[8] spanning both the West Bank and Israel and soon spreading to the broader region, which connected struggles against colonialism and patriarchy. In this and many other recent and often hidden struggles, ordinary Palestinians have made an immense contribution to resisting the deteriorating social conditions affecting both Palestine and the broader region.

The regional context: Socialist perspectives

Developments in Palestine have always been interwoven with those of the Middle East and North Africa more generally. The acceleration of Israel's attacks on Palestinians has occurred in tandem with deepening ties between the Israeli state and Arab governments, particularly the Gulf States. Arab elites seeking to reestablish order in the wake of a decade of popular revolutions have increasingly come to view Israel as a strategic partner.

The landscape of civil wars, sectarian conflicts, and expanding security ties with Israel marks a striking contrast with a previous era of Arab nationalism and aspirations of regional unity. Historically, Arab national feeling has served as an important counterweight to the legacy of colonialism and foreign domination. Arab unity resisted the artificial state divisions imposed by European colonialism and reinforced by the major powers after decolonization. In the decades following the Nakba, Palestinians turned to the Arab League as an ally.[9] In 1967, in response to popular pressure, member states of the Arab League agreed on a rejectionist

stance toward Israel, refusing to recognize, negotiate with, or make peace with an occupying power on Palestinian land.

This position—which in some cases is still trumpeted by leaders of these states—has subsequently been used as evidence of their commitment to the Palestinian cause, despite a long legacy of betrayals. Before the current thaw in relations, Arab governments had long been open to cooperation with Israel, despite rhetorical opposition. And Palestinian organizations have long criticized Arab leaders on this score. Though the record is spotty and contradictory, as Mostafa Omar's chapter in this book reflects, nearly every section of the Palestinian left has expressed in word—while not always in deed—a critique of the Arab ruling classes and advocacy of an orientation on the Arab masses. Even Fateh, which today is one of the chief collaborators with Israel's occupation, first distinguished itself with a position that "refused to allow [Arab governments] to represent [Palestinians] in their lethargy, diplomacy, and defeatism."[10]

Other sections of the Palestinian left have been even more consistent in positing the popular classes of the Arab world as the main allies of the Palestinians, rather than the various despots, kings, and generals who rule over them. The slogan "the road to Jerusalem begins in Cairo, Damascus, and Amman," often attributed to Palestinian Marxist George Habash, looks to popular struggle and Arab revolutions as the key precondition to winning victory in Palestine. In 1969, revolutionary socialists Jabra Nicola and Moshe Machover wrote:

> The Palestinian people are waging a battle where they confront Zionism, which is supported by imperialism; from the rear they are menaced by the Arab regimes and by Arab reaction, which are also supported by imperialism. As long as imperialism has a real stake in the Middle East, it is unlikely to withdraw its support for Zionism, its natural ally, and to permit its overthrow; it will defend it to the last drop of Arab oil. On the other hand, imperialist interests and domination in the region cannot be shattered without overthrowing those junior partners of imperialist exploitation that constitute ruling classes in the Arab world.[11]

Nicola drew from Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, which articulated the need for national liberation struggles to challenge the role of local capitalist classes as well.[12] This is in contrast to the strategy adopted by the Stalinized communist parties as well as some of the Arab nationalist organizations of the region, who argued for an anti-imperialist

front that subordinated the working class's independent interests to the national project.

The need to challenge local elites has been reaffirmed by the historical development of the subsequent thirty years. Rather than breaking with imperialism, Arab nationalism tragically ushered in, or in some cases was simply unable to resist, the rise of an increasingly powerful local capitalist class that exerted its influence throughout the region. This process was assisted by the strategy of neoliberalism that drew the various Arab states together with Israel into a "single economic zone under the domination of US economic power."[13] This has created an environment materially connecting the Arab countries of the region with Israel, thus investing the interests of national capitalists with that of settler-colonial Israel. From Egypt's business dealings and security cooperation with Israel to the $25 billion dollar trade dealings between Israel and the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the various examples of normalized economic and political relations with Israel are becoming more audaciously public.[14]

This is why the allies of Palestine regionally and internationally come from forces from below, from the so-called Arab street and the regional working class that—despite the orientation of their rulers—still rightfully see Israel as the anchor of foreign imperialism and the global forces that have rendered their own lives desperate while the coffers of the rich overflow. The Arab Spring provides a glimpse of the kind of struggle carried out by millions of ordinary Arabs against their own governments. The inspired mass mobilizations of the Arab Spring did more to shake up the status quo in Palestine than years of summits and negotiations with Israel's rulers. In just one example, the mass civil disobedience and sustained strikes by Egyptian workers came close to opening the Rafah Crossing into occupied Gaza. Throughout the region, masses in revolt voiced their support for the Palestinian national cause, and Palestinian flags flew in the centers of the uprisings in Cairo, Tunis, and Damascus. The "revolutionary mass struggle in each Arab state against its own ruling class that is tied, in one way or another, to imperialist interests internationally" desired and dreamed of by Palestinian lefists of prior decades had become a reality.[15]

The response to the Arab revolutions by local elites has been brutal and unyielding. The brutality is captured in the ominous refrain of Bashar al-

Assad's security forces, "Either Assad or we burn the country." The violent reaction and subsequent civil wars have devastated hundreds of cities and towns across Syria, Yemen, and Libya, while in Egypt a new authoritarian regime has implemented extreme measures of repression against the region's largest population. Nevertheless, popular struggles have endured. Just as it seemed that hope had been lost, mass mobilizations erupted in Algeria and Sudan that toppled long-standing dictators and reasserted the people's demands for justice and democracy. The persistence of this revolutionary wave underlines the need for supporters of Palestine to continue to link their efforts to a broader regional transformation.

The Palestine movement grows in the US

In the United States, attacks aimed at silencing and marginalizing the Palestine movement continue to intensify with new laws and lawsuits introduced each year. This escalation must be understood in the context of the massive sea change of public opinion we've witnessed in the last five years. The strength of the movement on the ground and the wave of activism has meant that Palestine is increasingly seen and understood as a component of the broader movement around racism, sexism, immigration, climate change, health care, and other aspects of social justice. As a result, the question of Palestine has developed into what Omar Barghouti described in this volume as "an inseparable and organic part of the global progressive" agenda.

Palestine featured prominently in some of the most important insurgent election victories in 2018. Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez emerged as three radical new voices in the US Congress. All three congresswomen have challenged the status quo on Palestine from day one—Tlaib fully embracing her Palestinian roots and Omar boldly calling out the many tragic and deadly affronts of US empire. Their victory reflects a radical opening in US politics to the Palestinian liberation movement.

In 2019, members of Congress openly debated whether or not Palestine advocates deserve the First Amendment–protected right to free speech. All this speaks to the extent to which Palestine has grown in importance to the progressive left. In fact, Israel's strategy of equating antisemitism with anti-Zionism is slowly losing its force as more and more Jewish activists make it clear that Israel does not represent them. In fact, the Israeli government

routinely sides with figures and groups of the far right, who themselves propagate and incite antisemitism.

Omar, Tlaib, and Ocasio-Cortez's persistent arguing for Palestinian rights and defense of BDS in the national spotlight is conditioned by the deeper shift in public opinion of Israel's occupation. This was driven by the success of many years of organizing in the Palestine movement on the grassroots level—from BDS campaigns on college campuses, churches, and city councils to the Great March of Return in Gaza. In 2018 Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar became the first sitting members of the US House to endorse BDS, flying in the face of decades of Democratic Party support for Israel. In addition, senator Bernie Sanders has put forth some of the most progressive and confrontational views on Palestine on offer in the conservative US Senate, for instance by releasing a video of testimonies from Gaza during the Great March of Return, at a time when the march was still being labeled as a "terrorist" operation.[16] Opinion polls reflect greater sympathy with the plight of Palestinians, especially among young people, who have witnessed Israel's increasingly public and unabashed rightward shift alongside the rise of Donald Trump and the return of neo-Nazi and white supremacist organizations to the public sphere. Indeed, the impact of this shift within the mainstream is reflected in the rise of groups like Democratic Majority for Israel, whose mission is to strengthen the Democratic Party's support of Israel and to ensure it will continue unconditionally. This is but one indicator that the progressive Democrats will continue to face the hurdles and contradictions of the Democratic Party.

Within this context, a collective of Palestinians in the US, led by Adalah Justice Project and the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, launched the Freedom Is Our Future platform.[17] Inspired by the demands put forward by the Movement for Black Lives and in collaboration with activists on the ground in Palestine, the platform demands an end to all funding of the Israeli occupation and puts forward a vision of liberation in Palestine and the United States. The platform reads, "It is long past time to divest from oppression and invest in our communities. In the US, we should invest in health care for all, equal access to education, and a healthier environment to ensure we have a future worth fighting for, instead of using our tax dollars to harm communities around the globe."[18] This perspective reflects the

growth of a resurgent American left that puts resistance to the US war machine at the center of a larger project of social justice.

While this growth is important and inspiring, the left and anti-imperialist movement in the US is still far from where it needs to be to successfully challenge US imperialism. As the movement reaches a new stage, activists across the country are strategizing over how to develop stronger organizations and reach larger audiences.

As socialists, we believe the sphere of labor and trade union politics must be at the heart of our future strategy. Expanding Palestine activism within the US labor movement will be crucial to the success of the Palestine movement. Internationally, in countries like South Africa, Tunisia, Norway, Malaysia, and Ireland, trade unions have mobilized in support of Palestine and leveraged the power of organized labor to bring attention to Israel's human rights violations. The US has also witnessed inspiring moments of labor solidarity with Palestine, as when Bay Area dock workers rallied behind the Block the Boat movement, refusing to unload an Israeli cargo ship during the 2014 bombardment of Gaza. Nevertheless, the influence of the Palestinian struggle inside US labor has generally been weaker than in other labor movements abroad, and instances such as Block the Boat have been few and far between. This is reflective both of general political trends in the country, and of the weakness of the American labor movement under three decades of the neoliberal employers' offensive, which brought union density and strike levels to historic lows.

In this context of defeats and dormancy, rank-and-file teachers have shown what a revived and militant labor movement can look like. In 2018, a wave of teacher strikes led by grassroots educators spread across eleven states, from West Virginia and Kentucky to Arizona and California. These strikes were organized from the bottom up, and teachers took enormous risks, including striking without legal protection, to fight for the schools their communities deserve. Hotel workers and nurses also struck in the same year, and by midway through 2018 more workers had gone out on strike than in any year since 1986. From the perspective of the Palestine movement, these developments reveal the potential that exists for working class people to change the political conversation and put progressive and radical demands on the agenda. If we can draw the connections between labor struggles here and the resistance in Palestine—from the squandering of US taxpayer money that funds the Israeli military, to the devastation of

the Palestinian school system by austerity and occupation—we can build a powerful new layer of support for Palestine that will help shift the balance of forces in our favor.

In order to build on these connections, Palestine activists should look to the already existing strength of the movement on college campuses. Over the last two decades, BDS has been strongest on campuses and has used this base of activity to find its way into the national spotlight. Strategically, Palestine activists on campus should build solidarity with education workers, including graduate students, faculty, staff, and students. By widening our coalitions on campus, we can help forge ties with organized labor outside the campus walls.

A second strategic consideration is to prioritize joining forces with workers involved directly or indirectly in the military industrial complex, like the employees of Google who have organized to resist their company's support for US empire. This type of anti-imperialist organizing within the labor movement will take on many forms, from connecting the fight for better healthcare and education to bloated military budgets, to combating efforts to divide workers based on nationality, immigration status, or religion. It is within this context that BDS can play a role in offering a clear and direct way to organize workers around withholding their labor from corporations and government institutions that enable US imperialism.

Charting a way forward

In a time of great uncertainty, of revolutions and counterrevolutions, hope and despair, what kind of course needs to be charted to win liberation for Palestine? We argue that a viable strategy for Palestine must draw the connections between the Palestinian struggle and the broader fight against capitalism and imperialism. As socialists, we are first and foremost internationalists. This is why we call for open borders, sanctuary for all, and an end to imperialism, which at its core strengthens and upholds capitalism by creating divisions based on nation, race, ethnicity, and religion. An internationalist struggle is one based on the emancipation of workers and the oppressed.

We see this strongly expressed in the Black-led rebellion that swept the country in the summer of 2020. Stoked by the racist disparities of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and triggered by the police murders of

George Floyd in Minneapolis and Breonna Taylor in Louisville, this multiracial, antiracist revolt is a transformative step forward in the Black Lives Matter movement. The struggle has evolved beyond resistance to police brutality into a general movement to defund and ultimately abolish the police.[19] It has swelled to a full-fledged revolt against institutional racism in the United States. In the midst of a global pandemic, this Black Lives Matter revolt appears to be the largest movement in US history, with estimates of 26 million people participating.[20] Like the explosions of the Arab Spring, this movement demonstrates the power and capacity of disruptive, mass protest from below to radically shift politics, change consciousness, and win material gains.[21] It is a breakthrough in the fight against systemic racism deeply embedded in the fabric of American's foundation. The rebellion reverberated internationally with solidarity demonstrations against racism and symbols of slavery and colonialism spanning from South Korea to Palestine. In charting a path forward for Palestinian liberation and against US imperialism, we see these developments as underscoring the nature of the road of mass rebellion and a shared fight to remake the world.[22]

The stand we take for Palestine has to be a stand against US imperialism as a whole. Our aim must be to rebuild an antiwar and anti-imperialist movement on the scale of the mass mobilizations that challenged the Vietnam and Iraq wars. The recent growth of a new socialist movement presents important opportunities for anti-imperialist organizing. Socialists can help build opposition to the extraordinarily wasteful and destructive military budgets that drain public resources year after year, and expose the many linkages between the crises driven by great-power competition abroad and those afflicting our communities at home. The success of the socialist movement in the US is particularly dependent on building a strong challenge to imperialism, as the US is by far the largest and most dominant military power in the world.

The very nature of Israel is inseparable from that of imperialism and settler colonialism. Therefore, its existence, as it is currently construed as an ethno-state, is inherently incompatible with justice. The apartheid system that has emerged in Israel has to be understood within the context of imperialism and the regional order it has created. Israel's powerful military

and advanced technology sector are strategically important to the US and to the stability of the elite-dominated system that covers the region. The depth of this connection cannot be reformed away, negotiated at international "peace" conferences, or put to one side. To create an alternative to the status quo in Palestine, we need a rupture that pushes the beyond the conception of a capitalist state, a revolutionary struggle not only within occupied Palestine but also in the streets of the Arab capitals across the region and among workers in the imperialist countries. What may seem an abstract formulation becomes clearer looking at the one-state solution to the situation in Palestine: a one-state solution that supplants Israel with a singular democratic state that affords equal rights to all and ensures the right of return to the 9.6 million Palestinians forced into exile by the ongoing Nakba.

Just as we cannot afford to view Israel's occupation in isolation, we cannot conceive of Palestine as a purely national question. As the revolutionary activist and scholar Frantz Fanon warned in the context of the Algerian anticolonial movement: "History teaches us that the anti-colonialist struggle is not automatically written from a nationalist perspective."[23] What type of Palestinian nationhood can be envisioned within a wider Middle East dominated by foreign powers, international capital, and autocratic elites?

Though the prospect may seem more daunting, winning liberation for Palestinians will require a much deeper social transformation challenging repressive states and imperialist backers, of the type that the Arab Spring has shown to be possible. In fighting for the end of settler colonialism, international socialism must not just be a rhetorical flourish, a component of analysis, or the identification of the actors; it must be inscribed on the banner of struggle and in the program of the fight. Both the Palestinian popular movement, from the First Intifada to the Great March of Return, and the Arab revolutions of the last decade have shown us that working-class people are willing to put their lives on the line to fight for real democracy, for the rule of the people over the rule of elites. Our vision of socialism, of a society run by and for working people, can build on this example and point toward a better future.

We have on this earth what makes life worth living



AFTERWORD

It's Time to Move

Remi Kanazi

On an early Friday morning in 2018, Palestinians rose up in popular protest across Gaza. The mass convergence was dubbed the Great March of Return. In the words of its founder, Ahmed Abu Artema, Palestinians sought to "break from behind prison walls." Braving a hail of tear gas and sniper fire, Palestinians risked their lives to end Israel's decade-long siege and return to their homes and land as refugees.

In the following year of protests, more than 1,500 Palestinians were shot in the head or neck. Israel massacred at least 260 Palestinians and injured more than 30,000 people. Snipers took aim at medics, journalists, families, and freedom marchers again and again, with little outcry from world governments and institutions.

As Palestinians were picked off one by one, an entire people were repeatedly reminded that no means of resistance was acceptable to Israel's backers. No popular protest. No armed resistance. No boycotts. No rallies, no demonstrations, no songs, no poetry, no nothing. Just collapse and die, or

disappear, or stay relegated to disconnected pockets of territory occupied by a foreign army. And yet, week after week, Palestinians continued to march and chant, and *dabke* (dance) and imagine, beyond the misery in front of them.

Right now, Gaza's youth unemployment is at a staggering 58 percent, and 97 percent of the local water supply is unfit for drinking. Eighty percent of the population depends on international aid, while Israeli occupation, blockade, and sniper bullets haunt Palestinian lives. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, farmers are kicked off land, doctors are cut off from hospitals, children are blocked from school, ambulances are turned back at checkpoints, and kids are abducted in the middle of the night by invading soldiers. Within Israel, racist laws and land grabs targeting Palestinian citizens continue to multiply, as the state mirrors its conquest of the West Bank in the Galilee and Naqab. And at the center of it all remains seventy-two years of Israeli ethnic cleansing and the denial to seven million Palestinian refugees of the right to return home.

We continue to live in a time of global repression, from the gunning down of protesters in Sudan to rising fascism in Europe to children being stuffed in cages in the US. Now, more than ever, is the time to probe these connections. The logic that justifies spending $2.1 million a year to put a single US soldier in Afghanistan facilitates the denial of health care, education, and functioning bridges and roads across that country. It is the same logic that subsidizes the bombing of power plants in Gaza and the use of tear gas on Black demonstrators in Minneapolis and across the US, as the murder of George Floyd triggered a summer of Black-led protest and revolt in 2020.

As detailed throughout this urgent book, what's happening in Palestine is not a "conflict," "rising tensions," or "competing narratives." Israel is a settler-colonial enterprise that extends far beyond 1967 and military occupation. What is at stake is a people's century-long liberation project, one that insists we look beyond the dystopian reality before us and the "peace process" mirage behind us.

Through the struggle for Palestine, we recognize interconnected systems, a battle against imperialism and neoliberalism. We view a longer history, from Sun City to Coachella Valley and Montgomery to Derry. And we affirm solidarity against structures of violence, from predatory

corporations and institutionalized racism to US wars and military occupation.

Inside Israeli apartheid, we see not just a system of control and collective punishment but an incubator for Israeli and US profit. We see tear gas testing grounds, a sound bomb laboratory, and new sniper scopes on display. We witness drone operators stalking trapped Palestinians and monitoring systems on the militarized US/Mexico border wall. We watch as companies produce technology to strangle Black and brown communities overseas while working with the US government to surveil, imprison, and expel unwanted populations.

But it is not enough to know; *we must act.* It is not enough to wag a finger, we must cut lines of complicity. As the US government subsidizes Israeli bulldozers and bullets, providing $3.8 billion a year in military aid to the state, US cities and university campuses are investing in companies that profit from wall construction and illegal settlement expansion.

Fifteen years ago, more than 170 Palestinian civil society organizations—from trade unions to academic associations to women's organizations—called on the international community to boycott, divest, and sanction the state of Israel until it ends its military occupation, ensures the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and enshrines equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel. Palestinians were not asking for saviors. They simply called for solidarity and action—an end to state, city, academic, and individual collusion in their oppression.

And so we continue to organize. On campuses, in local communities, inside unions and out on the streets, online and at rallies, in churches, mosques, and temples. We confront our coworkers, have tough conversations with relatives, challenge artists, push back on the academy, and knock on doors. We talk to shop owners, speak on panels, chair events, build mock checkpoints, and facilitate workshops. We create community that extends beyond Palestine, envisioning what liberation for all looks like through action.

But as we seek to challenge existing power structures, a host of right-wing actors are working against us. From Canary Mission to Israel on Campus, US students are spied on, professors are smeared, solidarity events are sabotaged, and neoliberal chancellors and university presidents bow to donors standing on the wrong side of history. We don't have the backing of

right-wing billionaire Sheldon Adelson or star-studded galas to raise funds for demonstrators in Gaza. We don't have waves of glowing op-eds in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* affirming our struggle for justice. But we have people power, student organizing, local coalitions, and a growing chorus of voices outraged at the injustice in front of them.

We also have momentum on our side. From a renewal of Black–Palestinian solidarity to streams of artists canceling their gigs in Israel to dozens of divestment bills on college campuses, the landscape today looks markedly different from the way it did even just three years ago. There was a time when one couldn't utter the word "apartheid" without being rebuked—universities shut down Palestinian cultural nights, film screenings were protested at local theaters, and most progressive groups wanted nothing to do with Palestine. Today, students leading the charge against the fossil fuel industry are also signing onto Students for Justice in Palestine divestment bills. Those advocating for Palestinian freedom are campaigning for prison divestment and the rights of undocumented people. New York University's (NYU) December 2018 divestment bill is just one example. More than fifty student groups endorsed the measure, which passed overwhelmingly via secret ballot. Endorsing groups included NYU Divest for Climate Justice, the Black Student Union, the Asian American Women's Alliance, SHADES: For LGBTQ Students of Color and Allies at NYU, and the Anthropology Undergraduate Student Association. As of 2019, more than seventy-seven universities have passed boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) resolutions and referendums.

Countless people continue to mobilize for Palestinian freedom in South Africa, Ireland, Chile, the UK, and beyond. More than eighteen thousand people signed a petition calling on Iceland to pull out of Eurovision in Israel. Celebrities such as actors Jesse Williams and Mark Ruffalo voiced support for jailed Palestinian teen Ahed Tamimi. Angela Davis, Talib Kweli, and Marc Lamont Hill have weathered attacks, smear campaigns, canceled gigs, lost jobs, and rescinded awards to stand firmly with Palestine. From the Dream Defenders to the Red Nation, Black, Native, Latinx, queer, and Jewish organizations continue to take action and show solidarity.

Within the halls of Congress, tiny steps are being made. Twenty-one House members signed on to Representative Betty Collum's Promoting Human Rights for Palestinian Children Living Under Israeli Military

Occupation Act, which cuts US taxpayer dollars tied to the military detention of Palestinian children. Representatives Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib became the first two members of Congress to sign on to the right to boycott. Tlaib, who is Palestinian, also vocalized support for the Palestinian right of return and a one-state solution, which envisions a nation stripped of colonial privileges for Israelis and ensures freedom for all people.

This doesn't put an immediate stop to Israeli settlement expansion or bombing campaigns, and a congressional bill or celebrity retweet means little in isolation. However, these collective actions represent a sea change in consciousness. And it wouldn't have happened without a radical movement that helped carve the path to where we are now; a thirty-two-person protest during a Chicago winter in 2002, intersectional student organizing in the 1980s, and Black-Palestinian solidarity in the 1960s that created the foundation that people stand on today. Our progress in this moment is intimately connected to the founding of Israeli Apartheid Week, to the crafting and inserting of a language that is now commonplace. It is a reflection of movement, of imagining beyond the crumbs brushed off the table.

If you are reading this book, I imagine you care. You've watched documentaries, you've been to protests, you've picked up pamphlets, read articles or books, and you want to know more. You want to sharpen your knowledge, advance your skills, or analyze information through a revolutionary and socialist framework. You are part of a flourishing left that refuses to affirm the status quo and stay silent as the world burns down around us. So what does one do? *Plug in.* Show up, show love, conceptualize creative ways to take action. Attend a meeting locally, make a flier, help organize a demonstration, volunteer for a fundraiser, research a divestment campaign, coordinate a panel, hold a sign at a rally, be an audience member, educate a friend, retweet, share on Facebook or Instagram, and signal-boost online. Or join an organization. So often we are searching for the silver-bullet solution or feel the need to master every aspect of a topic that we overlook doing something in the moment. Palestine is settler colonization in motion, it is an apartheid state expanding, it is poised for the next massacre, as these words are being written.

This is why we need movement organizing. Movements shape discourse, movements create a platform for the next critic of Israel to stand on, movements slowly crack open the doors to new arenas, creating fertile

ground where Palestine is no longer a taboo issue or a thorn in the side of even progressive spaces. In fact, support for Palestine is imperative for those who proclaim to stand on the side of justice. Are you for the status quo or against systems of oppression? Are you for or against stripping away basic rights from indigenous people? With corporations jacking up prices on insulin and lining their pockets from the construction of walls and pipelines, where do you stand? As the climate change crisis threatens lives *today*—not at some distant moment down the road—what are we doing to build a better future?

If this book does nothing else, let it make you think and question, yearn to be a bit more strategic, and sharpen tools and tactics as we aim to put our principles into practice. The struggle for Palestine is now. It is as necessary as it has ever been, and our collective struggles have created more capacity for alternative futures than at any other time over the last generation. It is you. It is us together. It is time for us all to *move.*

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Notes

Introduction

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42. Asa Winstanley, “Israel Is Arming Neo-Nazis in Ukraine,” *Electronic Intifada*, July 4, 2018.
43. Jewish Voice for Peace, “Revealed: Deputy Director of ICE Sent by the ADL for Training with the Israeli Military,” press release, August 8, 2018.
44. Asher Schechter, “Richard Spencer Is Simply the Latest Far-Right Extremist to Laud Israel,” Haaretz, October 21, 2017, https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/richard-spencer-just-the-latest-far-right-extremist-to-laud-israel-1.5459294.

Chapter Two

1. The Sykes-Picot Agreement only came to light after the Bolsheviks published the secret documents of imperial powers, including that of the previous Russian regime, in 1917.
2. France had already established its colonization of Algeria in 1830 and occupied Tunisia in 1881. Britain occupied the Sudan beginning in 1890.
3. Adam Hanieh, *Lineages of Revolt: Issues of Contemporary Capitalism in the Middle East* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), 21.
4. Quoted in Hanieh, *Lineages of Revolt*, 21.
5. In 1947, Stalin and Zhadanov’s “Two Camps” perspective was adopted in the USSR in response to the Truman Doctrine. It claimed that the world was split into two camps, one the imperialist, antidemocratic Western pole, and the other the anti-imperialist, democratic Soviet pole. In reality, both were imperialist powers aiming to control and dominate territories rather than encourage workers’ power, indigenous autonomy, or genuine democracy. This began a period of “bipolar world order,” with the US and the USSR dividing the world into their areas of influence, lasting until the fall of the USSR in the 1990s.
6. Noam Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel and the Palestinians*, updated edition (Cambridge: South End Press, 1999), 19.
7. *Haaretz*, September 30, 1951, quoted in Lance Selfa, *The Struggle for Palestine* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2002) 30.
8. Naseer Aruri, *Dishonest Broker: The US Role in Israel and Palestine.* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2003), 16.
9. Andrew Cockburn and Leslie Cockburn, *Dangerous Liaison: The Inside Story of the US-Israeli Covert Relationship* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 61.
10. Joel Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There? Marxist Politics and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Egypt and Israel, 1948-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 12.
11. Gilbert Achcar, *Eastern Cauldron: Islam, Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq in a Marxist Mirror* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 14.
12. Israel had decided that Nasser needed to be toppled after the arms deal with the USSR in 1955. See Benny Morris, *Israel’s Border Wars: 1949–1956* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 287–96.
13. Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle*, 20.

14. Achcar, *Eastern Cauldron*, 15.
15. Achcar, *Eastern Cauldron*, 16.
16. Hanieh, *Lineages of Revolt*, 24.
17. Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There?* 206–7.
18. Achcar, *Eastern Cauldron*, 15.
19. Achcar, *Eastern Cauldron*, 14.
20. In 1956, Israel asked the US for arms, and it refused. See Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, 297.
21. John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux, 2007), 25.
22. Mearsheimer and Walt, *Israel Lobby.*
23. Achcar, *Eastern Cauldron*, 19–20.
24. Aruri, *Dishonest Broker*, 19.
25. The process of forced expulsion of Palestinians, in particular from East Jerusalem, would only continue from there. Israel has entrenched its network of settlements and Jewish-only roads in the West Bank, and built an Apartheid Wall to further curtail Palestinian movement and steal Palestinian land. Over fourteen thousand Palestinians from East Jerusalem alone have been stripped of their residency and expelled since 1967. See https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/08/08/israel-jjerusalem-palestinians-stripped-status.
26. Israel Shahak, *Israel's Global Role: Weapons for Repression* (Belmont: Association of Arab-American University Graduates, 1982), 5.
27. Palestinians comprise a majority of Jordan's population.
28. For more on the events in Jordan and debates in the national liberation movement, see chapter 3 in this book.
29. David Schoenbaum, *The United States and the State of Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 180.
30. Cockburn and Cockburn, *Dangerous Liaison*, 167.
31. Cockburn and Cockburn, *Dangerous Liaison*, 168.
32. Salah Jadid, on the left of the Baʻath Party, sent troops to support the Palestinian guerrillas, but Hafez al-Assad—at the time sharing power with Jadid in Syria—maneuvered to block any further mobilization. Hafez al-Assad soon expelled Salah Jadid in a power struggle between the left and right wings of the Baʻath Party. Needless to say, the right wing of the party took power, Hafez al-Assad became president, and Jadid died in a Syrian regime prison.
33. Cockburn and Cockburn, *Dangerous Liaison*, 168.
34. Schoenbaum, *United States and the State of Israel*, 187.
35. Shahak, *Israel's Global Role*, 48.
36. Shahak, *Israel's Global Role*, 58.
37. Shahak, *Israel's Global Role*, 16.
38. It bears mentioning that Argentina received arms from Israel while it sheltered Nazis and tortured and disappeared thousands of Jewish dissidents.
39. Shahak, *Israel's Global Role*, 25.
40. Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle*, 13.
41. Aruri, *Dishonest Broker*, 39.
42. Aruri, *Dishonest Broker*, 41.
43. Aruri, *Dishonest Broker*, 7.

44. Though there is no agreed upon definition of terrorism, the term is typically reserved only for acts of violence committed by non-Western powers; Aruri, *Dishonest Broker*, 46.
45. Even Israel's massacres like those of March and April 2002—the slaughter in Jenin refugee camp—became models that excited US military planners; see Aruri, *Dishonest Broker*, 47.
46. The wall was deemed illegal in 2004 by the International Court of Justice, but Israel has continued to build and expand upon it.
47. Researching the American–Israeli Alliance & Jewish Voice for Peace, *Deadly Exchange: The Dangerous Consequences of American Law Enforcement Trainings in Israel*, report, September 2018.
48. Ashley Smith, "China's Rise as a World Power," interview by Loong Yu Au, *International Socialist Review* 112 (Spring 2018).

Chapter Three

1. A previous version of this essay appeared in *The Struggle for Palestine*, edited by Lance Selfa (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2002).
2. Editors' Note: Arafat was the leader of the Palestinian Authority and the PLO at the time this essay was written.
3. Edward Said, *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000), 188.
4. The First Intifada lasted from 1987 to 1993. See Phil Marshall [Phil Marfleet], *Intifada: Zionism, Imperialism, and Palestinian Resistance* (London: Bookmarks, 1989), 149–76.
5. Marshall, *Intifada*, 191–208.
6. Center for Socialist Studies (hereafter CSS), *The Palestinian Question: A Revolutionary Perspective* (Cairo, Egypt: The Center for Socialist Studies, 2001), 28–29.
7. Editors' Note: Sheikh al-Qassam's membership in the Brotherhood is unsubstantiated and seems historically unlikely. His membership in the Brotherhood is claimed in Hamas's first covenant.
8. Marshall, *Intifada*, 40–41.
9. Marshall, *Intifada*, 40–43.
10. CSS, 32–36; Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906–1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 241.
11. Marshall, *Intifada*, 59–61.
12. The Russian Bolshevik Party formed the Comintern in 1919 to organize mass communist parties around the world. A number of Arab socialists, especially from Egypt and Palestine, were fascinated by the example of the Russian Revolution and its recognition of the right of self-determination for oppressed nationalities in the tsarist Russian empire. This led to the formation of small communist parties in a number of Arab countries, including Palestine.
13. Joel Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There? Marxist Politics and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Egypt and Israel, 1948-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). [Editors' Note: NLL members did go on to be the backbone of the Communist Party of Jordan that then, through a series of splits and mergers, would emerge again in the early 1980s as the Palestinian Communist Party and play an important role in the organizing that led to the First Intifada.]
14. Marshall, *Intifada*, 115–20; CSS, 43–47.
15. See "The Palestine National Charter as Revised by the Fourth PNC Meeting, July 1968" (extracts), in Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organization: People, Power, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 267–68.

16. Marshall, *Intifada*, 99–101. In the mid-1950s, Palestinian oil workers led a series of militant strikes against oil companies in Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states. In 1956, Palestinian workers organized protests against the invasion of Suez. This prompted the Gulf countries to ban strikes in the oil fields.
17. Marshall, *Intifada*, 123–27; CSS, 47–51.
18. Quoted in Cobban, *Palestinian Liberation Organization*, 60–61. Israel assassinated Khalaf in 1990.
19. Marshall, *Intifada*, 132.
20. For a summary of the PLO's shift to the "mini-state" strategy and an analysis of the 1988 decisions, see Muhammad Muslih, "Towards Coexistence: An Analysis of the Resolutions of the Palestine National Council," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 19, no. 4 (Summer/Spring 1990): 3–29.
21. CSS, 95–96.
22. Editors' Note: The petit bourgeoisie are small capitalists like shopkeepers and owners of small businesses. The term can also refer to what's often called the new middle class.
23. CSS, 95–104; Marshall, *Intifada*, 115–27.
24. The PFLP abandoned—and then repudiated—hijackings in the early 1970s.
25. Marshall, *Intifada*, 177–96.
26. Samih K. Farsoun with Christina E. Zacharia, *Palestine and the Palestinians* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 193.
27. CSS, 95–104; Marshall, *Intifada*, 97–100.
28. Editors' Note: The Egyptian Islamic Jihad started in the late 1970s as a splinter group from the Muslim Brotherhood, influenced by Sayyid Qutb.
29. CSS, 104–5.
30. The full text of the Hamas Charter is available at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp.
31. CSS, 105–09.
32. CSS, 112–13.
33. Hamas Charter.
34. Editors' Note: Some of this would change based upon Hamas's decision in 2005 to contend for elections within the PLC. See chapter 6 in this book for more.
35. Said, *End of the Peace Process*, 35–36, 84–85, 106.
36. Marshall, *Intifada*, 188–89.
37. On the Palestinian elections, see Ali Jarbawi, "Palestinian Politics at a Crossroads," *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Summer 1996), 37–38, and Khalil Shikaki, "The Palestinian Elections: An Assessment," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (Spring 1996), 18.
38. Abu Ali Mustafa, "The Palestinian Secular Opposition at a Crossroads," interview, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 2 (Winter 2000), 84. In August 2001, Israel assassinated Mustafa.
39. "Debate with the Palestinian Left," challenge-mag.com, undated.
40. An October 1, 2000, PFLP statement, issued days after the al-Aqsa Intifada began, called for a "return to the decisions of the international legitimacy as postulated in the related United Nations and security council resolutions, as the terms of reference for further peace talks and as an alternative to the Israeli force and the American-biased position" ("Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine," press release, available on the Netherlands-based Anti-Imperialist League Web site at www.lai-aib.org).

41. Graham Usher, unpublished interview with Anthony Arnove, Ahmed Shawki, and Nigel Harris, Jerusalem, July 2001. A theoretical slide has accompanied the DFLP and PFLP loss of political initiative. Once considering themselves a vanguard in the region against US imperialism, the DFLP's former general secretary, Nayef Hawatmeh, recently wrote, "The Palestinian national liberation movement must set itself the goal of communication and reaching a common understanding with the US. This could help convince the US to pressure Israel to respect all previous UN resolutions and international law." And PFLP founder George Habash recently declared, "It is no longer necessary to fight against US imperialism or defeat it in order to defeat Israel" (CSS, 101–4).
42. Emad Mekay, "Egyptian Labor Reforms Fuel Militancy," *Asia Times*, February 13, 2002.

Chapter Four

1. A previous version of this essay, entitled "What's the Matter with the Israeli Working Class?" appeared in *International Socialist Review* 110 (Fall 2018).
2. Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution: Vol. 2. The Politics of Social Classes* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 40–48.
3. Draper.
4. Socialist Alternative writes that "at this stage, advancing a programme which proposes a solution in the form of one joint state for both nationalities, even a socialist state, is not capable of supplying a basic answer to the fears, suspicions and the intense yearning for national independence on the part of both national groups. Nevertheless, the role of the Marxist left is also to explain that working class layers and the masses of all national groups have an interest, at root, in a united struggle around a programme for socialist change." https://www.socialistalternative.org/2016/04/30/israelpalestine-marxist-left-national-conflict-palestinian-struggle/.
5. On the "In Defense of Marxism" website, which is of the International Marxist Tendency, the authors of an article titled "Against the Blanket Boycott of Israel" write of the BDS campaign: "What is notable about this campaign is that it ignores the question of class in both Israel and Palestine. We believe that only a working class approach can put an end to Israeli imperialism … the difference between the ruling class and the workers is that the Israeli working class—objectively speaking—has absolutely no interest in oppressing the Palestinian masses. While the bourgeoisie makes billions of dollars off of the production of weapons and the slaughter of innocents, the working class has to watch its sons and daughters sent off to die in wars for profit." After surmising that had Israeli workers conducted a general strike during the First Intifada the "revolution" would have been successful, and ignoring the tedious fact that no workers were calling for a general strike, they conclude, "the solution will not come without working class Israeli Jews; they will play the central role! This is why we reject the BDS campaign as counter-productive [*sic*], and a campaign that strengthens bourgeois Zionism." http://www.marxist.com/against-blanket-boycott-israel-working-class-solution.htm.
6. Moshe Machover and Akiva Orr, "The Class Character of Israel," *The Other Israel: The Radical Case Against Zionism*, edited by Arie Bober (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972).
7. This was a break from the popular left-wing conception of Zionism, which accepted it as a left-wing national movement. Decades of collaboration between European and British social democratic parties and trade unions with the Israeli Histadrut and Labor Zionist parties had influenced this position. The socialist tradition owes a great debt for the clarity with which Matzpen put forward their radical perspective. Socialists today who argue against the BDS movement on the pretext that it hurts and thus alienates the Israeli working class would do well to read the original writings of Matzpen.

8. There were other faulty suppositions in the article, not least of which was its conclusion that Palestinian Arabs and Israeli youth before their military service—"who are called on to wage 'an eternal war imposed by destiny'"—are potential allies, since this sacrifice may instill anti-Zionist sentiment among them. Even while the rates of enlistment to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have diminished to some degree, they remain incredibly high. According to 2015 IDF records, the average rate of enlistment in the sixty-five largest cities was 77 percent, with fifty-one of those cities exceeding 70 percent. The youth have clearly not been convinced by anti-Zionist arguments, or by the abundant evidence of the IDF's war crimes, that they should refuse military service. And as risks diminish with technological advancements in military capability, the material rewards gained from enlistment are all the more appealing. They also argued that the immigrant character of Israeli society, as 75 percent of the population was foreign born, had a backward effect on worker consciousness. However, even if this argument were valid in its own right, today the inverse is true—only 27 percent of Israelis are foreign born.
9. Machover and Orr, "The Class Character of Israel."
10. Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). Shafir based his analysis on the work of D. K. Fieldhouse and George Fredrickson.
11. Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins*, quoting Frederickson, 1988.
12. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4, (2006): 387–409. Wolfe quotes Theodor Herzl from his pamphlet *The Jewish State*, "If I wish to substitute a new building for an old one, I must demolish before I construct."
13. The word "aliyah" means ascendance, as in the ascendance to Zion.
14. In fact, unlike in America, there were few serious natural resources driving corporate plunder.
15. Even today Palestinian labor is not used to break strikes or undermine Jewish workers. In fact, a racialized class stratification ensures that they rarely work the same jobs, even within the same industries. To do otherwise would undermine the character of the pure settlement.
16. Descendant from the Borochovist Poalei Tzion Party and precursor to Meretz, MAPAM formed in 1948 under the auspices of the Marxist-Zionist left-wing challenge to the MAPAI Party (Workers' Party of the Land of Israel). See notes 19 and 25.
17. Joel Benin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
18. "Present-absentee" is a designation Israel gave Palestinians who remained within the 1948 borders but who were not allowed to return to their original homes.
19. Benin, *Was The Red Flag Flying There?*
20. Established in 1920, the Histadrut tasked itself with the employment of Jewish workers in Palestine, either by securing them positions within existing institutions and companies, or by employing them directly through its own contracting company and other subsidiaries. It also founded its own health care system and its own bank. It became the primary agent for the boycotting of Arab labor and produce, and was from its inception until the late 1960s an exclusively Jewish labor organization. Because it was also an employer, it functioned unlike other workers' unions, and often worked in collaboration with the state and the bourgeoisie to curb worker militancy.
21. Once the Histadrut was no longer building the state it ceased to play the central role in the Zionist project, and MAPAI took its place. However, Histadrut-affiliated corporations and collectives proliferated after 1948, and by the 1950s Solel Boneh generated 8 percent of Israel's national income. Histadrut enterprises employed 25 percent of the workforce; half its members were in some way earning a living through the Histadrut.
22. In 1952–66 alone West Germany paid Israel 3 billion marks in reparations. Today that would be equivalent to over $111 billion in modern currency. In the early years this was almost 90 percent

of Israel's income.

23. A "corporatist system" was a common post-World War II arrangement between government, the ruling labor party, and a national trade-union with the nation's capitalists, in an effort to save capitalism. Lev Luis Grinberg in his study of Israeli corporatism, *Split Corporatism in Israel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) describes this as an agreement based on full employment coupled with wage restraint. The government must subsidize workers' livelihoods with benefits not deriving from wages.

    However, such an agreement was never actually reached in Israel. Those scholars, like Grinberg, who theorize on the success or limits of Israeli corporatism have suggested that Israel fell into a pluralist category, a state in which the existing class interests were represented by powerful organizations contending for influence. Ostensibly they exert such influence to similar degrees.

    In reality, it is actually the *particular nature of a settler working class* that puts it in the unique position of "partner" to the state. This guarantees it some protections, while at the same time subordinating its particular interests to that of the state and the capitalist class the state is tied to. In the Israeli case, corporatism was objectively dispensable, Shalev argues, because *even in its absence revolutionary class conflict could be avoided.*

24. For example, Mizrachi workers were often barred from entering the labor market or offered only unskilled seasonal or temporary jobs. They were also housed in "temporary" tents or housing units made of tin for many years until they were moved to small apartments and often lived in cramped living quarters. Meanwhile their white counterparts were quickly integrated into the workforce and offered permanent housing within months of their arrival.

25. Eban quoted in David Hall-Cathala, *The Peace Movement in Israel, 1967–87* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1990), 86. Ben Gurion quoted in Shay Azkani, "The Silenced History of the IDF's 'Mizrahi Problem,'" *Haaretz*, August 28, 2015.

26. Michael Shalev, *Labour and the Political Economy in Israel* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1992).

27. Ehud Ein-Gil and Moshe Machover, "Zionism and Oriental Jews: Dialectic of Exploitation and Co-optation," *Race & Class* 50, no. 3 (2009): 62–76.

28. Ein-Gil and Machover, "Zionism and Oriental."

29. While the legacy of racism and white supremacy has always deformed the US labor movement, the high points of labor struggle have always forced labor to confront the color line. There were also notable instances of cross-racial solidarity in the South, for example—the Brotherhood of Timber Workers, the Populist Movement, and during the New Orleans General Strike of 1892. The United Mining Workers of America was famously multiracial when the AFL was still segregated, and that was because of how dangerous the labor was and how much trust was necessary between skilled and unskilled workers. The CIO, under the moderate leadership of John Lewis, opened its doors to Black workers because Lewis realized that organizing the unskilled was the only way to defend the whole labor movement. The CIO wound up taking a stance against lynching, segregation, and racial discrimination. The best traditions of labor solidarity in US history have led to the types of interracial organizing and struggle that have hardly ever happened in Israel.

30. Ofer Aderer, "How Levi Eshkol's Government 'Engineered' Israel's 1966–67 Recession," *Haaretz*, February 16, 2016.

31. David Hall-Cathala, *The Peace Movement in Israel, 1967–87* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1990), 97.

32. Shalev, *Labour and the Political Economy in Israel.*

33. Adam Hanieh, “From State-Led Growth to Globalization: The Evolution of Israeli Capitalism,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 32, no. 4. (2003): 5–21.
34. Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler, *The Global Political Economy of Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).
35. For more information on the incestuous nature of the Israeli ruling class and how it came to be, see Nitzan and Bichler’s *The Global Political Economy of Israel*, 84–136.
36. Ben Sales, “The Corruption Scandals Plaguing Netanyahu and His Family, Explained,” *Times of Israel*, August 9, 2017.
37. Adam Hanieh, *Lineages of Revolt: Issues of Contemporary Capitalism in the Middle East* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013).
38. Calculations derived from “Jewish Employed Persons, by Occupation (2011 Classification), Sex, Continent of Birth and Period of Immigration, 2016), Table 12-9, Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics. US statistics are from US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Table A-13, “Table A-13. Employed and unemployed persons by occupation, not seasonally adjusted,” April 2018.
39. These estimations of the non-Jewish workforce are calculated after subtracting the “total” workforce statistics for the comparable 2016 data from the statistics for the Jewish employed. See Table 2-10, “Employed Persons, by Occupation” (2011 Classification), figures for 2016, at http://cbs.gov.il/publications18/saka0118q/pdf/tab02_10_q.pdf.
40. Andy Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid: Palestine/Israel and South Africa after 1994* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017). Economies that rely on greater wages and benefits for workers to promote consumption. Fordism also refers to the use of deskilled assembly-line production.
41. However, Clarno writes that today, “Inequality in South Africa is more severe … than it was under formal apartheid … the South African state was democratized, but the neoliberalization of racial capitalism has placed important limits on decolonization.” He contends that a socioeconomic apartheid still exists for most black people, as only 7.5 percent of South African land has been redistributed since the end of apartheid. Meanwhile, in Israel the neo-liberal colonial strategy similarly involves the extension of limited autonomy to the Palestinian Authority, but with a degradation of Palestinian peasant and workers’ lives. See Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid.*
42. Lidar Gravé-Lazi, “More Than 1 in 5 Israelis Live in Poverty, Highest in Developed World,” *Jerusalem Post*, December 15, 2016.
43. According to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and the World Bank.
44. For example, 89 percent of water resources in the West Bank are extracted by the Israeli water company Mekorot. Similarly, 0.3 percent of GDP is natural gas, supplied primarily from off the Gaza shore.
45. Shalev writes, “The most salient feature of the US aid package has been its close relationship to the cost of Israeli purchases of American arms … instead of having a major portion of foreign assistance at [the government’s] disposal with which to direct economic development, the state routinely turns over almost the entire inflow of aid for military purposes. This inability to freely channel US aid in the most economically and politically rewarding directions eliminated one of the most important sources of the dominant party’s power.” Shalev, *Labour and the Political Economy.*
46. Israeli census figures: 297,000 are employed in high-tech: 111,000 are employed in manufacturing hi-tech.
47. For example, it takes 148 monthly salaries to buy a home in Israel, compared to 66 in the US, making new homes “unattainable for the average worker.” However, lower home prices and

government subsidies to settlers make homes in the West Bank more affordable. These economic factors reinforce the drive to colonize the West Bank. See Miriam Berger, “Sticker Shock Greets Israeli Homebuyers,” *US News and World Report*, February 14, 2017.

48. Tikva Honig-Parnass, “The 2011 Uprising in Israel,” January 12, 2012, http://www.israeli-occupation.org/2012-01-09/tikva-honig-parnass-the-2011-uprising-in-israel/.
49. For more on this position, see Moshe Machover, “Belling the Cat,” December 13, 2013, www.israeli-occupation.org/2013-12-13/moshe-machover-belling-the-cat/-sthash.L0PEg9TP.dpuf, and Tikva Honig-Parnass’s critique of this position, “One Democratic State in Historic Palestine,” http://isreview.org/issue/90/one-democratic-state-historic-palestine.
50. Machover and Orr, “The Class Character of Israel,” 87–101.

Chapter Five

1. Edward Said, “The Morning After,” *London Review of Books*, October 21, 1993.
2. Toufic Haddad, “Palestinian Forced Displacement from Kuwait: The Overdue Accounting,” *Al Majdal* 44, (Summer-August 2010).
3. Benoit Faucon, *West Bankers* (London: Mashrek Editions, 2010), 90.
4. *Ha’aretz*, February 14, 1994, cited in “Stacking the Deck: The Economics of the Israeli-PLO Accords, E. Murphy, *Middle East Report*, 194/195 (1995), 36.
5. Gilbert Achcar, “Zionism and Peace: From the Allon Plan to the Washington Accords,” *New Politics* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1995), 95–115.
6. Editors’ Note: His crimes are many but include the 1953 massacre of civilians in Qibya, Jordan, the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, and complicity in the massacre of thousands at the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps, to name but a few.
7. Hamas, “Electoral Platform of Change and Reform,” quoted in Khaled Hroub, “A ‘New Hamas’ Through its New Documents,” *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 35 (Summer 2006), 8.

Chapter Six

1. Wendy R. Pearlman, “Palestine and the Arab Uprisings,” Northwestern Scholars (Oxford University Press, April 23, 2019), https://www.scholars.northwestern.edu/en/publications/palestine-and-the-arab-uprisings, Abstract.
2. Pearlman, “Palestine and the Arab Uprisings.”
3. Jehad Abusalim, “The Great March of Return: An Organizer’s Perspective,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 47, no. 4 (January 2018): 90–100.
4. Abusalim, “Great March of Return,” 91.
5. Jacob Høigilt, “The Palestinian Spring That Was Not: The Youth and Political Activism in the Occupied Palestinian Territories,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 343–59.
6. Palestinians in Gaza used the term *tansiqiyat* in the beginning of the Great March of Return, inspired by the term used in the Syrian uprising to name local coordination committees.
7. “The 2015 Arab Opinion Index: Results in Brief,” المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2015).
8. “The 2017–2018 Arab Opinion Index: Main Results in Brief,” ودراسة السياسات المركز العربي للأبحاث (The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, July 2018).
9. “The 2017–2018 Arab Opinion Index,” 16.

10. “Baheyya: Egypt Analysis and Whimsy بهيّة,” (blog), April 30, 2005.
11. Ghassan Kanafani, *The 1936–39 Revolt in Palestine*, Marxists Internet Archive (New York: Committee for a Democratic Palestine, 1972).
12. Samir Amin and Ali el-Kenz, *Europe and the Arab World: Patterns and Prospects for the New Relationship* (London: Zed Books, 2005).
13. Nadia Belhaj Hassine, “Economic Inequality in the Arab Region,” *Policy Research Working Papers*, 2014.
14. Timothée Boutry, “Ben Ali, Dégage! Dégage!” *Le Parisien*, January 15, 2011.
15. Harriet Sherwood, “Binyamin Netanyahu Attacks Arab Spring Uprisings,” *Guardian*, November 24, 2011.
16. Bernard Lewis, interview by David Horowitz, “A Mass Expression of Outrage against Injustice,” *Jerusalem Post*, February 25, 2011, cited in Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012).
17. Kumar, *Islamophobia.*
18. David Ignatius, “David Ignatius: Israel’s Arab Spring Problem,” *Washington Post*, July 6, 2012.
19. Yaniv Voller, “After the Arab Spring: Power Shift in the Middle East? Turmoil and Uncertainty: Israel and the New Middle East,” *LSE Ideas Reports*, edited by Nicholas Kitchen, London School of Economics and Political Science (May 2012): 59–63.
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Chapter Eight

1. The phenomenon of holding on to "the old ways," frozen in a nostalgically romanticized past, is common to colonized societies around the globe and often manifests as a cementing of regressive practices.
2. Close to 80 percent of Palestinians are displaced, some "internally," only minutes from their historic homes, now occupied by Israeli settlers or left vacant, even as their Palestinian owners live as refugees, while millions of others are in the diaspora, scattered all across the globe, as Israel denies us the universally recognized human right of return.
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6. Israeli society is overall quite conservative, with some more tolerant or accepting "pockets," such as Tel Aviv. The Jerusalem Pride March, for example, an annual event which started in 2002, generally meets with protests by conservative Jews; there were stabbings of marchers, by a conservative Jew, in both 2005 and 2015; and the 2006 World Pride march, scheduled to take place in Jerusalem, was cancelled as a result of harsh objections by conservative Jewish communities.
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10. The November 1917 Balfour Declaration is a public statement in which Britain's Lord Balfour informs Britain's Lord Rothchild of King George V's sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations. The entire statement, setting into motion European Jewish emigration to Palestine through a Western imperial cursory note that reduces the Palestinian people to "non-Jewish communities," reads: "His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."
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12. I have read, and heard, a few reports about this incident, some dating it to 1936, others to 1938. It is primarily recounted as oral history and does not appear in British or Israeli publications. A Wikipedia entry tells of the British military burning down the village of Baqa al-Gharbiya, and taking the men away, in 1938, without mentioning the women's role in securing the men's release. While I do not personally question that the incident happened as oral history has preserved it, I would argue that, even if it were little more than a fanciful flight of imagination, the "story" is still revealing in that it shows women, not a few valiant men, as rescuing their kin.
13. Referring to the perpetrators of the Deir Yassin massacre as "Israeli" is anachronistic, as the massacre predates the creation of Israel. Specifically, this massacre was perpetrated by members of the Irgun and Lehi militias, which had been known to engage in terrorist acts.
14. I use "political" here in the mainstream sense of the word, even though I believe there is little distinction between the personal, the social, and the "political."
15. Palestinian women secretly sewed Palestinian flags, which were illegal, by cutting the right length of different colored cloth in different homes, so that if Israeli soldiers searched these homes they would find only red, or only green, or black, or white cloth. Transporting the different components of the flag to one house, where it would be assembled, was a dangerous mission, which women undertook.
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21. The details of the murder remain unclear, but the broad strokes are that this was a so-called "honor crime" committed by Israa's brothers and father. Israa's screams were recorded by an employee at the hospital where she was being treated for a spinal injury suffered during an earlier beating by her family members. Israa's very loud screaming, behind closed doors in her hospital room, was posted on social media and immediately went viral.
22. Tal'at is a collective of Palestinian women formed in 2019. Their charter reads: "Women's emancipation must be prioritized and central to our liberation strategies, discourse, and action. We see that fighting violence and oppression of women and seeking justice and dignity for all must be recognised as the core of our National Liberation."

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Index

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Contributors include Jehad Abusalim, Shireen Akram-Boshar, Omar Barghouti, Nada Elia, Toufic Haddad, Remi Kanazi, Annie Levin, Mostafa Omar, Khury Petersen-Smith, and Daphna Thier.

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PALESTINE

A SOCIALIST INTRODUCTION



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